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THE ORPHAN;

OR

MEMOIRS OF MATILDA.



**THE ORPHAN;**  
**OR,**  
**MEMOIRS OF MATILDA.**

**BY EUGÈNE SUE,**  
**AUTHOR OF THE "MYSTERIES OF PARIS."**

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**ILLUSTRATED BY**

**ROBERT CRUIKSHANK.**

**IN TWO VOLUMES.**

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# THE ORPHAN;

OR

## MEMOIRS OF MATILDA.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE CAFE LEBŒUF.

TOWARDS the end of December, 1838, you might have seen (and probably might see still) an unpretending coffee-house rejoicing in the name of "Le Café Lebœuf," situated in the street St. Louis, in the Marais, and opposite to the ancient hôtel D'Orbesson, which vast and melancholy residence had been let, after being inhabited during many generations, by an old family of legal pursuits. Its last proprietor, the President D'Orbesson, had died a few months after the Restoration. In the month of October, 1838, the bills announcing that the mansion in question was to let, had been taken down. An old porter, who had taken care of the place, was dismissed, and a tenant entered into possession of this sombre building, which had two stories, a court yard on one side, and a garden on the other. A large worm-eaten gate, flanked by a couple of square buildings which were used as offices, opened into the street. The hôtel D'Orbesson, even when inhabited, appeared to the full as deserted and solitary as before.

The grass continued to grow as thickly as ever at the threshold of the great gate, which had never been opened since the arrival of the last tenant, known as Colonel Ulric. In the more populous, or fashionable quarters of Paris, one is pretty well secure from the scandal or curiosity of one's neighbours. Every one is too much occupied with his

own pursuits, or his own pleasures, to waste a time which is so valuable in those old womanish tales, and that worrying and eternal *espionnage* which are the great delights of a provincial community. Such, however, is not the case in certain more retired quarters of the capital; we mean those which are for the most part inhabited either by persons who live upon a small competency of their own, or by old fellows retired from affairs. These are people pre-eminently idle and passionately fond of the marvellous, and who are constantly possessed with the imperious desire of discovering all that is going on in the streets, or in other people's families. Be it said, however, to the praise of these worthy citizens who are so fond of exercising their imaginations, that they care but little for the importance of those facts on which they are pleased to bestow a poetical clothing after their own fashion. Any thing, the least out of the common affords an amply sufficient foundation for them, on which to build up the most monstrous romances; and these fictions, so complaisantly brought into the world, satisfy and content them for many months.

But should the persons whose affairs they are so desirous of investigating be unfortunately obstinate in never affording them even the pretext for one of their favourite fables, but envelope him or herself in a web of impenetrable mystery, the curiosity of these idlers thus driven back and defeated, with no issue by which it can find a vent, becomes speedily wound up to a pitch of phrenzy. When they have arrived at this state, they recoil from no methods, however extreme, in order to gratify their darling passion.

Such had been the effect which Colonel Ulric, during the three months he had inhabited the Marais, had succeeded in producing upon the baffled curiosity of his neighbours who were, most of them, frequenters of the Café Leboeuf, which was situated, as we have already said, opposite the hotel D'Orbesson.

Nothing could appear more extraordinary than this Colonel's mode of living; his windows were always closed; he never left the house unless it were in a mysterious way, through a little garden-gate, which opened upon an unfrequented alley. The Colonel's servant was a tall man, of forbidding aspect. Every morning a little door in the offices was opened to admit a basket of provisions, furnished by a neighbouring eating-house keeper, and was immediately closed again.

The inquisitive gentry opposite having only this solitary circumstance whereon to ground their conjectures, managed to bribe the tradesman who furnished the provisions; and endeavoured to form some idea of the manners and disposition of the mysterious Colonel by a conscientious investigation of the articles of food with which he was daily supplied.

In spite of the extreme development of their inventive faculties, the frequenters of the Café Leboeuf were unable to form any serious hypothesis from these data.

The Colonel appeared addicted to a very simple and temperate

diet. Nevertheless, it was darkly hinted, by some of the more imaginative spies, that it was just possible the man of mystery might devour the chickens raw, like an Ogre. These insinuations, however, although not without an appearance of being well grounded, were not attended to for the moment.

Another and most important remark ! The postman had never brought a single letter to the hôtel D'Orbesson ; not one person for three months had crossed its mysterious threshold.

You may guess how many stratagems had been laid, in order to get a word or two of information out of the Colonel's servant, or at least to get a peep at the inside of the house.

All the seattempts proved fruitless, and the neighbours, reduced to a kind of armed observation and uninterrupted surveillance, had established the centre of their operations at the Café Lebœuf. At the head of the inquisitors were two brothers, named Godet, both bachelors, and both formerly employed as clerks, in the lottery-office. Since the Colonel had taken up his quarters at the hôtel D'Orbesson these two brothers had discovered a purpose, or at least the shadow of one, for their existence, which, hitherto, had been passably uninteresting. Bent upon discovering who the mysterious unknown could be, they formed fresh projects every day, and made fresh efforts to unravel the living enigma, which so tantalized them.

The Widow Lebœuf, hostess of the Café, was an auxiliary to the two brothers. Entrenched behind the great bottles of cherries and the silver punch bowls, which were the ornaments of her bar, she kept her large, staring eyes continually levelled at the doors of the hôtel.

We need not feel surprised at this perseverance in playing the part of spies in a desert, when we reflect that the very uselessness of our idlers' investigations was a powerful incentive to their curiosity. They were in daily expectation of discovering some important fact.

As we said before, December was drawing to a close. The clock in the coffee-house had just struck twelve, and Madame Lebœuf, with her nose clapped close to the window, was dividing her attention between the snow, which was falling in heavy flakes, and the door of the hôtel D'Orbesson.

The Widow was surprised at not having yet seen the two brothers Godet, who were regular customers of her's, and never missed coming every morning to breakfast in her house.

At last they passed the window, entered the house, and took off their cloaks, which were dripping with snow.

"God bless my soul, Monsieur Godet," exclaimed the widow, addressing the elder brother, whose head was bandaged up, "what has happened to your forehead ?"

The elder Godet was a fat, bald man, of ruddy complexion, with a prominent "corporation," and an important and dogmatical expression of countenance. He lifted up a little the bandage of black

silk which concealed his left eye, and replied, with an indignant air, and in a bass voice, which would have done credit to the chorister of a Cathedral—

"It is some of the doings of that monster, Robin of the Woods." (The inquisitors of the Café Lebœuf had thus ingeniously nicknamed the inhabitant of the hôtel D'Orbesson.)

"It is some of the doings of that monster, Robin of the Woods," repeated the younger Godet, who played the part of a faithful echo to his brother.

"Lord have mercy upon us ; do make haste and tell me all about it," cried Madame Lebœuf, trembling with impatience.

"It is soon told, my dear Madame," replied the ex-clerk. "It was high time to have done with this adventurer ; this vagabond, this profligate, who crouches over there in his den, like a real wild beast ! (And mind though I do call him a wild beast, I am not assailing his honour or his morality ; I merely ask this simple question, if he is not after some mischief, or has not been after some, why the deuce should he hide himself like a real wild beast ?)"

After this victorious parenthesis, the elder Godet lifted up again the bandage over his left eye.

"Very true ; why should he hide himself," repeated in chorus, the attentive frequenters of the Café.

"It is just like our government !" continued Monsieur Godet with bitterness, "which is always scenting, nosing out, and arresting conspirators ; but where the safety and tranquillity of peaceful citizens are concerned, your humble servant ! there is no more a constable or a commissary of police to be found, than there would be among the Hottentots."

"Than there would be among the Hottentots," echoed Monsieur Godet, junior.

"Alas ! my good Madame Lebœuf," continued the elder Godet, "what did I do ?—what ought I to have done, in the dangerous situation in which we found ourselves, and having only my own powers to rely upon ? Why, I said to myself, said I, 'Godet, thou art an honest man ; thou hast a duty, a great duty to accomplish ; do what thou oughtest to do, Godet, be the event what it may. There is in thy neighbourhood a vagabond, an adventurer, a profligate, who, to the beard of a whole street, of a whole quarter of Paris, dares to hide himself in a most impudent manner, for whole weeks, nay, months together, and this, too, without the Government taking a single step to put an end to such a public scandal.'"

"You may well call it a scandal," said Madame Lebœuf, "it is impossible to know what those neighbours are at who never show themselves. In such a case one is obliged to scandalise them."

"It is a frightful scandal," continued Godet the elder, "I not only say so, but I will prove it ; it is an evident, palpable fact that this adventurer turns up his nose at the opinion of his fellow citizens, by thus withdrawing himself from their severe, but equitable appreciation, 'Man proposes ; but God disposes.'"

Madame Lebœuf, who did not exactly see the à propos of this philosophical quotation, and was impatient to get to the pith of the story, exclaimed,

"Very true, Monsieur Godet, but how do you come to have that bandage over your eye?"

"You shall soon know, my dear Madame; yesterday I called my brother, my worthy brother, and said to him, 'Dieudonné, we must put an end to this intolerable abuse; we must, even at the risk of our lives, find out who and what this adventurer is. I will not conceal it from thee, my brother,' continued I to Dieudonné, 'it is a question of life and death with me. It is now three months since this profligate has inhabited our quarter of the town, and as I have, during that time, vainly endeavoured to find out who he is, and what he does, I can scarcely be said to live. I am eaten up with uneasiness; I have most atrocious dreams and abominable nightmares. It has got to such a pitch, that even my physical functions are beginning to be affected. Yes, my dear Madame Lebœuf, as I have the honour of informing you, my functions are beginning to be affected.' So I said to myself, 'Godet, thou shalt not commit such a suicidal act as to dig thy own tomb, for the pleasure of this adventurer. This mystery, Godet, excites thee unmeasurably—well, then; find out this mystery, and thou wilt then deserve to recover that tranquillity of thine, which this vagabond has wickedly disturbed.' I did what I said, my dear Madame; yesterday at nightfall, I borrowed a ladder from our neighbour, the carpenter; I crossed the street with Dieudonné; we entered the alley, into which Robin of the Wood's little garden gate opens; I placed the ladder against the wall; I ascended; there was just daylight enough left to see into the garden and into the interior of the house."

"Well!" cried Madame Lebœuf.

"Well, Madame, just as I was pushing my head forward, in order to look over the top of the wall, a gun was fired."

"Gracious Heavens! a gun!" cried the widow.

"A real gun, Madame, a real attempt was made on my individual existence; my hat fell off, and I felt myself struck in the forehead and the eye, just as if I had received the pricks of a thousand pins thrust home, and I heard the voice, (I should recognise it among a thousand) I heard the voice of that adventurer's janissary exclaiming, with a ferocious and sarcastic accent, "Next time it shall be good large slugs, instead of dust shot; next time the face shall be aimed at instead of the hat." Such, my dear Madame Lebœuf, is the pleasant state of things to which we are brought by the Government. You see it yourself, peaceable citizens are coolly massacred, even on the top of the highest walls."

"Why it is downright assassination," said Madame Lebœuf, "you must go to the commissary, Monsieur Godet, and have some witnesses."

"That is exactly, my dear madame, what I said to myself, as I

rather precipitately descended from the ladder ; ' yes,' I said to myself, ' Godet, thou must go this instant and make thy complaint to the magistrate.' But you shall just see under what an agreeable government we have the pleasure of living. A quarter of an hour afterwards I entered the Commissary's office, just as they were lighting his lamp—his lamp, indeed—intended, I suppose, as a derisive emblem of the clear-sightedness which that functionary *ought to possess* ! I took with me most convincing evidences, namely, my hat, which was full of holes, and my forehead, which was completely blue.

" Well !"

" Well, Madame Lebœuf, the Commissary told me—he had the indecency to tell me, that I had only got what I deserved, and that if it had not been for the high estimation in which, for the last twenty-two years and some months, I have been held throughout this neighbourhood, he would have been obliged to prosecute me for breaking into an inhabited house at night."

" The wretch !" exclaimed Madame Lebœuf.

" And thus," continued Monsieur Godet, the elder, with bitter irony, and an emphasis worthy of Cicero, " and thus an adventurer may insolently excite public curiosity, by concealing his person ; and an honest citizen, of good reputation, may be shot, yes, shot with impunity, because he has attempted to escape from the state of anguish, uneasiness, and perplexity into which his ignorance of a mystery which may, perhaps, be of importance to the public safety, has plunged him. Listen, Madame Lebœuf," added Monsieur Godet, in an oracular tone of voice, and drawing himself up to his full height, " a great man once said, I do not know who he was, but that is of no consequence ; it *was* a great man who said it, ' Every citizen ought to live in a glass-house.' I myself set an example of this ; my house is a glass one ; in fact, more a great bottle, than a house ; let every body look in there, and they will see me always devoted to the tranquillity of my fellow citizens, and ——"

Monsieur Godet was unable to finish his philippic, for he was interrupted in the middle, by a most astounding event. A very handsome carriage, with a conspicuous coat of arms painted on its panels, and drawn by two beautiful horses, suddenly pulled up before the great gate of the hôtel D'Orbesson.

This carriage had come at a foot's pace, and from the blinds being drawn up, it was clear that no one was inside. A *chasseur*, in a splendid livery, descended from the box, where he had been sitting with the coachman who wore an amaranth coloured fur cloak.

Scarcely had the *chasseur* touched the knocker of the door, when, for the first time for three months, it opened to admit the carriage, and was then instantly closed again.

The idlers of the Café Lebœuf stared at one another in a kind of stupefaction. They were, doubtless, about to indulge in the most extravagant observations when the door was again opened.

The carriage was driven rapidly out, and a man, still young, and of a very swarthy complexion, was observed sitting, in an easy attitude, inside. He wore the uniform of a Hungarian Lancer, white, with a blue collar, covered with gold embroidery. Round his neck, and on his breast, glittered several crosses and foreign orders.

"Well, I'm sure," exclaimed Monsieur Godet the elder, "then Robin of the Woods is, after all, some great nobleman of a foreign country."

"He is a tolerably good looking fellow, but looks extremely insolent," was Madame Lebœuf's observation.

"Did you see his two orders ; one, of gold, and the other, of silver ?" said the younger Godet.

"Dear, dear, dear," added Godet the elder, muttering between his teeth, "and I, who thought in my secret soul that, despite his title of Colonel, the adventurer, the profligate, the vagabond, was something like a retired bankrupt."

"I have an idea, gentlemen," suddenly exclaimed Madame Lebœuf. "Perhaps he is an actor ; I have seen some of the equestrians at the Cirque Olympique, dressed in that style."

"But," rejoined Monsieur Godet, "how could that magnificent carriage belong to a troop of actors ? And besides, plays are not acted in the middle of the day."

"But, now I think of it," said Madame Lebœuf, "perhaps that horrid man who lives with Robin of the Woods, will let you go in now that his master is gone out."

"You are quite right, my dear madame," replied Monsieur Godet, "you are quite right ; but under what pretence shall I introduce myself into the house ?"

"You have only got to say that you have come to apologise for what happened yesterday," timidly suggested Godet junior.

"What ! apologise for his having nearly put out my eye ! Dieu-donnè, you are mad. On the contrary, I shall go and complain to him of the incivility he was guilty of yesterday, and that will be a way of getting him into conversation. You shall see."

When he had said this, Monsieur Godet went out and knocked at the little gate.

The gloomy figure of Colonel Ulric's servant appeared at the little wicket.

"What do you want ?" he enquired.

"It was I who yesterday received ——"

"You will receive a precious deal more, if you come again," was the servant's agreeable answer, as he hastily closed the wicket.

Monsieur Godet, sadly disappointed, returned to his fellow-conspirators, and the Café Lebœuf was echoing with the most extraordinary conjectures about Colonel Ulric, when the interesting subject of conversation was interrupted by the noise of a carriage, which pulled up before the hôtel D'Orbesson.

It was the Colonel returning ; a minute afterwards the carriage which had brought him went out again at a foot's pace.

Monsieur Godet pursued the vehicle, and endeavoured to get into conversation with the coachman and the *chasseur*, but he could not draw a single syllable from either ; whether it was that they did not understand a word of French, or that they did not choose to answer their interrogator.

Monsieur Godet and his friends concluded from this obstinate silence that Colonel Ulric was waited upon by mutes, a circumstance which increased, to an infinite degree, the terror already inspired by this man of mystery.

Did the carriage belong to the Colonel ? This, also, was a question impossible to decide.

The next day, the day after, and succeeding ones were spent by the frequenters of the Café, in looking out for the carriage, which, however, appeared no more.

No change seemed to have taken place in the solitary habits of Robin of the Woods. The curiosity of the two Godets was still more violently excited since they had discovered that the Colonel was young, good looking, and no doubt, of a high standing in society. They no longer showered upon him the complimentary epithets of vagabond and adventurer ; but contented themselves with calling him *Robin of the Woods*, which nickname appeared decidedly appropriate to the mysterious existence which he led.

A new idea began to torment the brothers Godet ; they were anxious to discover if the Colonel (who had never been seen to pass by in the street) was in the habit of leaving his house by the door which opened on the alley.

Two blackguard boys were posted as sentinels, one at each end of the passage, whose apparent pursuit was a game at marbles ; but who were privately instructed to watch if any one appeared at the little gate.

For three days the two urchins remained conscientiously at their post ; but saw no one.

The two Godets, impelled by the demon of curiosity, who was destined to urge them to enterprises still more dangerous, were patient enough to put themselves, in their turn, in ambush for two whole days, at the entrance of the alley, in order to verify the report of the boys ; but they saw no one either go out or come in.

The snow had been replaced by a hard frost, so that there was no way of tracing footsteps in the alley.

The frequenters of the Café Lebœuf at last arrived at this triumphant conclusion, viz., that if Robin of the Woods kept at home all day, he must, necessarily, go out at night.

In order to satisfy himself upon this point, the elder Godet had recourse to a stratagem which the last of the Mohicans would infallibly have employed for the purpose of tracking the *moccassins* of a hostile warrior.

One very dark night, the two brothers strewed down before the little garden gate, and over all the breadth of the alley, a thick

layer of ashes of equal fineness, and then withdrew in raptures with their invention. It would be impossible to describe with what uneasiness and anguish of mind they hastened to the alley next morning at day dawn.

At last all doubts were cleared up. Robin of the Woods *did* go out at night, and the trace of his footsteps upon the ashes had betrayed him.

Satisfied upon this point, the two brothers had only to renew the experiment, in order to discover whether the Colonel's walks took place *every night*, and whether they were frequent, or at rare intervals.

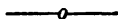
They soon became convinced that the Colonel went out every night, and in all weathers.

Where could he go to ?

The grounds they had already got to go upon would have been sufficient to stimulate the most sluggish curiosity.

The frequenters of the Café Lebœuf assembled in extraordinary council, and it was unanimously resolved that the two Godets, who were always foremost in valour, should, on the first dark night, place themselves in ambush, one at each end of the alley.

Thus dogged, the Colonel could not help passing by one or the other of the two inquisitors, and the lucky one was then to follow his steps with the greatest precaution, to prevent his being caught, precautions by no means unnecessary, since from the manner in which the elder Godet had been received when on the top of the ladder, it might be reasonably inferred that Robin of the Woods was not particularly anxious to initiate strangers into the pursuits of his mysterious existence.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE LETTER.

THE day after that appointed for the expedition of the two brothers, Madame Lebœuf, too impatient to sleep, had got up earlier than usual, and kept walking from her bar to the door, and from the door back again to her bar, in a state of inexpressible uneasiness.

Had the two Godets succeeded in their enterprise ? or had they run into any danger ?

As the customers continued to arrive, the general curiosity increased every moment.

One of the idlers, who had meditated the whole night upon the subject, and well weighed together all that was as yet known of the mysterious Colonel, had at first declared that the object of their curiosity could be nothing else than a spy of high rank.

This bright idea was triumphantly refuted by one of the listeners,

who made the sagacious observation, that as Robin of the Woods never went out, as far as could be judged, except at night, it would be rather difficult for him to exercise that honourable calling.

The other, who was an obstinate fellow, replied to this objection that the Colonel only did that in order to guard against any suspicion, a suspicion which only rendered his *espionnage* still more dangerous.

Notwithstanding the interest excited by this discussion, the two brothers were by no means forgotten ; every body was astonished at their long absence, as it was already twelve o'clock, and yet neither the one nor the other had appeared.

Madame Lebœuf, who well remembered the history of the elder Godet's peppering by the charge of dust shot, and who began to be fearful that something equally, or still more tragical, had occurred, was just about to send the waiter to make enquiries, when the two Godets made their appearance.

The brothers were received with a general exclamation of curiosity, " Well, well, tell us all about it."

" Well," said the elder Godet with a most gloomy expression of countenance, " we have found out a nice kettle of fish."

It was then, for the first time, only perceived that the two brothers were as pale as death. Was this paleness to be attributed to the fatigues of the preceding night, or to the reaction after some great danger ? We shall learn this from the history told by the elder Godet.

The frequenters of the Café formed a circle round him, and he thus began—

" I need not tell you, gentlemen, that, having courageously devoted my existence to the clearing up of that dark mystery, which, I make bold to say, is a matter that deeply concerns all honest people——

" If there is no need of telling us, why the devil do you say anything about it ?" wisely observed one of the audience.

" What do you mean ?" rejoined Monsieur Godet.

" Why," replied the other, " you first of all exclaim, ' I need not tell you, gentlemen,' and then you go on telling us just the same."

" Never mind, never mind," was exclaimed on all sides. " You are always talking nonsense, Monsieur Dumont. Go on Monsieur Godet ; we are listening to you with all our ears."

" Well, then," continued Godet, " yesterday, at nightfall, I and my brother here, Dieudonné, placed ourselves in ambush, one at each end of the alley, fully determined to get at the bottom of the dark mystery aforesaid. The parish clock struck seven—nothing—eight—nothing—nine—nothing—ten—nothing—eleven——"

" What courage, to wait so long in the cold," exclaimed the admiring audience.

"How you must have longed for a bowl of hot wine !" murmured Madame Lebœuf.

"I was not surprised," continued Monsieur Godet, in a doctoral tone of voice, "I was not surprised at this delay ; on the contrary, I rather expected it. I had said to myself, 'Godet, if anything is to happen, I forewarn thee that it will happen about midnight, for that is generally the hour when criminal enterprises are'—but I will not anticipate. Twelve, then, had just struck, when I distinctly heard crick, crack, and the lock of the little gate was opened."

"Ah ! at last !" exclaimed the audience.

"How your heart must have beat, Monsieur Godet," observed the landlady ; *I* should have fainted."

"Nature, my dear Madame Lebœuf, having conferred upon me the gift of courage, which, indeed, is the attribute of every Frenchman ; I buttoned my coat well up, and prepared to follow my man. I must confess, however, that my forehead was all over a cold perspiration, an effect which I attributed to the influence of the atmosphere. I heard Robin of the Woods—but no—he is not even worthy of that name now ; but he shall be called in future by a name which he has well deserved, and which is one a thousand times more awful. But I will not anticipate. I heard, then, Robin of the Woods approaching on my side, with a most peculiar and terrible step—a step, I might almost call tormented by remorse. My very breath stood still ; I drew myself into the smallest possible compass against the wall, and it was so dark, he did not see me ; he passed me at last, and I then followed his steps with, if I may use the expression, with the tenacity of a staunch hound after his game. In the mean while, Dieudonné who had heard him approaching on my side, ran up, and we both pursued our man, or rather our—but I will not anticipate. On, on, on we go. Heavens ! how engrossed by his remorse must that wretch have been, not to perceive that we were at his heels !"

"It is enough to make one's hair stand upright," said the Widow, "when I think that he might have seen you."

"Had such been the case, Madame, I had an answer all ready, an answer which I had carefully prepared, in the anticipation of a collision between us."

"And what was the answer ?"

"A very simple one—the street belongs to every body," replied Monsieur Godet, with the look of a hero.

"How was he dressed ?" enquired Madame Lebœuf.

"As far as I could judge, he had on a black cloak, and a large hat. At last, after innumerable turnings and twistings, we arrived—where, do you think ? I would defy you to guess in a year."

"We all give it up !" exclaimed, with one voice, the frequenters of the Café.

"Pray, Monsieur Godet, have compassion upon us," said Madame Lebœuf.

The worthy man having enjoyed, for an instant, the general impatience, continued at last in a sepulchral tone of voice—

"We arrived—Oh ! gentlemen"—

"Go on, go on," was vociferated from all quarters.

"We arrived at the cemetery of Père-Lachaise."

"At the cemetery of Père-Lachaise !!!" repeated the audience, in accents of horror and dismay.

Madame Lebœuf was so overcome, that she found a glass of rum necessary to restore her to herself.

"God bless my soul, what could he go to the cemetery for, at that time of night ?" exclaimed the Widow, as soon as she had disposed of the rum.

"You will soon know, gentlemen, you will know too soon," continued the narrator. "We arrived at the gate of the cemetery. The gate was locked, of course, as it very properly ought to be, in that field of repose, so that nothing should disturb the rest of the departed. Then our man—I mean *the* man, for I disown all community of nature or feelings with such a monster—the man who was, doubtless, provided with a false key, a jemmy, a centre-bit, or some other instrument of iniquity, familiar to rascals like him—the man, I repeat opened the gate, and closed it after him."

"Then, what became of you ?" enquired Madame Lebœuf.

"I and Dieudonné had the courage to wait for this abominable, sacrilegious wretch till four o'clock in the morning. During that time he was, doubtless, occupied in some abominable and profane orgies, like those you may remember in the famous melo drama, called '*The Vampire*.'"

"A vampire !" exclaimed Madame Lebœuf. "Do you still believe in vampires ? Can it be possible that our opposite neighbour is a vampire—a real vampire ? oh ! how horridly delightful !"

"Thank God, my dear Madame Lebœuf, I am not sufficiently superstitious to believe in those monstrous vampires which are represented in the melodrama ; but I do not believe that people sneak into cemeteries, in the dead of the night, without some barbarous and unnatural motive, which induces me—till I am better informed—to change the name of Robin of the Woods, for that of the *Vampire*. And with reference to this, I feel it my duty to declare openly, that he who does not respect the repose of the grave, will, sooner or later, become a tenant of the tomb himself, for," philosophically added Monsieur Godet, "the arm of Providence always reaches the guilty."

"What you say is simple enough, for every body dies, sooner or later," muttered the worthy who had already criticised Monsieur Godet so unmercifully.

Godet, with a look of anger at the critic, concluded with these words—

"When the man, whom I have no hesitation in calling a vampire, left the cemetery of Père la Chaise, we followed him as closely as before ; firstly, because he was going our road, and in the next place, because in case of any awkward adventure on the way, three persons would be safer than two. At last the vampire got back to his starting-place, and went through the alley into his house, or rather I ought to say, into his den, whence he will, doubtless, to-night again set forth, in order to continue his work of dark and mysterious horrors."

Monsieur Godet's story did not completely satisfy his audience.

This visit to the cemetery, with the addition of the Colonel's brilliant appearance in so magnificent a carriage, served as a fresh theme for the interminable conjectures of the frequenters of the Café, and the general curiosity was more than ever inflamed.

None of them, indeed, with the exception of the Widow, believed positively in vampires ; but still the Colonel's conduct was extraordinary enough to give rise to the most fantastical ideas.

The discussion, when at its height, was interrupted by the entrance of the postman who brought a letter for Madame Lebœuf, and the widow, as the day was bitterly cold, very considerably poured him out a glass of brandy, as a recompense for his trouble. This good action immediately met with its reward.

The postman took out of his box a tolerably large letter, sealed with a large, black seal, and observed to the widow—

"The neighbour opposite is a precious bad customer of mine ; for he has not had a single letter these three months ; however, he has got one this morning, worth a dozen single ones. Well, well," added the man of letters with a self-complacent facetiousness, "it seems that Colonel Ulric likes big slices better than little crumbs."

"Gentlemen ! gentlemen ! a letter for the vampire !" exclaimed Madame Lebœuf, who had seized the epistle, and held it over her head with an air of triumph.

The customers hurried up and formed a circle round the bar.

"Oh ! Madame, Madame," cried the postman, who, dreading his confidence had been abused, eagerly stretched out his hand to recover his letter.

"Don't be afraid, my good fellow ; we will do no harm to the letter ; let us only just have a peep at the address," was the widow's answer, to the postman's appeal.

"Only just a peep," added Monsieur Godet, and seizing the letter with a hand actually trembling from emotion, he laid it down gingerly upon the marble slab of the bar.

"Have another glass of brandy, my good fellow," said the widow, to the postman ; "five minutes sooner or later is of no consequence ; you need not be in such a hurry to deliver this letter."

The postman drank a second glass of brandy, but without taking his eyes off the letter.

"Let us see, let us see," said the widow, "what is the address ?"

and she read it out—M. le Colonel Ulric, 38, Rue, St. Louis, Paris.

"What is the seal ? is it a coat of arms ?" was asked by one of the inquisitors.

"No ; merely a dotted lozenge."

"What is the postmark ?" enquired another of the spies.

"The Paris one," answered the postman, "time, twelve o'clock, and a franc's postage to pay, I should say, from the weight ; but, come, Madame Lebœuf, I am sure you must have seen enough of that letter by this time.

"Wait just a minute, my good fellow ; how red your nose is to-day ; have another glass of brandy, the cold is intolerable," was the widow's caressing reply.

"No, thank you ; no, thank you, Madame Lebœuf," said the postman ; "make haste with that letter."

Godet and the other customers contemplated the envelope with an eagerness that had something in it almost of ferocity ; and they examined, with the greatest attention, the thick, blueish, glazed paper, and the fine and delicate hand-writing.

Suddenly the widow clapped her flat nose to the letter, and exclaimed—

"Oh ! how it smells of musk ; what a horrid smell !"

Now, truth obliges us to declare that the perfume, which so decomposed the nose of Madame Lebœuf, had not the slightest affinity to musk ; but to the noses of some people there is no perfume but musk ; and musk, we know, has been handed down by tradition, as a most abominable scent.

All the customers of the Café Lebœuf alternately clapped their noses to the letter, and there was one general exclamation, "How it stinks of musk !"

"It is a woman's letter !" suddenly exclaimed Monsieur Godet, with the inspired air of a prophet, "and a woman, too, who uses perfumes."

"Pouah," sneered the Widow Lebœuf with a pout of supreme disdain.

"And a woman, too," observed another of the idlers, "who does not prepay a letter of such moment—a letter for which a franc's postage is charged."

"It is plain enough," continued Madame Lebœuf, shrugging her shoulders, "that she can be no great things ; doubtless, some good for nothing wretch—a creature who uses perfumes, and who has not got money enough to pay the postage of her letters."

"Stop a bit ! stop a bit !" said Monsieur Godet, who seemed lost in reflection, "this small, fine, neat, hand-writing—the number put before the street—yes, yes, I have it ; this letter comes from an English woman."

"What *could* an English woman who used perfumes have to do with a handsome foreign Colonel, who kept at home all day, and prowled about cemeteries all night ?"



“It is a woman’s letter.”



Such was the summary of the questions which the knot of inquirers asked themselves.

Their heads were all bent over the fatal letter, and their eyes sparkled with concupiscence.

Truly one might affirm, without calumniating human nature, that had it been in the power of the Café inquisitives, at that instant, to have drowned, by their unanimous volition, the unlucky postman, in order to possess themselves of the precious epistle, the red-collared messenger would have been in considerable peril.

The widow could bear it no longer ; she boldly lifted up a corner of the envelope, and endeavoured to see something of the contents.

The postman rushed forward and seized his letter, exclaiming, that for such a violation of confidence, he should lose his place, and be sent to prison into the bargain.

The widow, on her part, carried away beyond all bounds, by the demon of curiosity that possessed her, would not leave her hold of the letter, and the envelope would have been torn in the desperate struggle, had not one of the inquisitives suddenly exclaimed,

"Gentlemen ! gentlemen ! here's a fresh start—a woman—a real flesh and blood woman, who appears to be looking for the number of the vampire's den."

The effect of these words was magical.

The widow resigned the letter, which was already crumpled, and clapped her broad face close to the window, the panes of which were streaked like marble from the effects of the frost. The postman hurried away, delighted to have escaped from such a murderous ambushade. Madame Leboeuf slightly scratched away, with her nail, sufficient of the frozen mist from one of the panes, to enable her to get a glimpse into the street, and her eyes were soon most attentively employed.

"Gentlemen," observed Monsieur Godet, "we must not let ourselves be seen for fear of scaring yonder woman ; let us follow the example of our dear hostess, each look through our own peculiar hole and—*motus*. Once at their different posts, the inquisitives were amply repaid for their past three months of dreary anticipation ; important events seemed to tread upon the heels of one another on that memorable day.

The postman knocked and delivered the letter to the Colonel's servant, who examined the envelope with a suspicious air not altogether devoid of irritation.

Scarcely had the postman disappeared, when the female, whose approach had been telegraphed by the inquisitives, came up to the great gate of the mansion ; but finding no knocker, she directed her steps to the little door of the left hand office.

She appeared to be a person somewhat advanced in years, was remarkable by her troubled and agitated manner, and had on a

black bonnet and a brown cloak, under which she seemed to carry something concealed.

After having rung at the little door, instead of waiting for it to be opened, she began to walk backwards and forwards, probably with the view of being less noticed.

When the Colonel's servant made his appearance, the elderly female gave into his hand a little tortoiseshell casket, inlaid with gold. She then disappeared, after having made an evidently preconcerted signal to some third person, whom the inquisitives of the Café Lebœuf were, as yet, unable to see.

The servant looked for an instant at the casket with surprise, and then closed the door.

Monsieur Godet, the widow, and their fellow conspirators stood with breath suspended behind their respective window panes, and awaited with unspeakable impatience the appearance of the invisible person.

That person at last appeared.

It was a young woman, whose age might be five and twenty years. Her dress was simplicity itself, consisting of a small, black velvet bonnet, a morning gown of very deep *carmélite gros de Naples*, and a large, black, cashmere shawl, which came down to the flounces of the dress; her hands were concealed in a marten muff, which just allowed to peep out the corner of a pocket-handkerchief, richly trimmed with Valenciennes lace. To complete the picture, the prettiest little feet you can conceive, seemed to tremble with the cold in their small, delicate, black, satin boots.

At first sight, this young person, whose beauty was remarkable, struck your attention by the contrast which existed between her magnificent fair hair, and her large, black eyes, and strongly marked eye-brows, which were also black. Her cheeks were half concealed by some long and thick ringlets, kept in their position by the pressure of her bonnet; she was extremely pale in spite of the excessive cold, which one should have thought would have given colour to her complexion, and terror was imprinted on every feature of her countenance.

Twice she raised, towards Heaven, her eyes, bathed in tears, and when she had rejoined the person who was waiting for her, she wore a melancholy smile upon her lips, which displayed a row of teeth of the most lovely enamel.

She quickened her pace as she passed the door of the Café Lebœuf.

Monsieur Godet could hold out no longer; he peeped through the door, held slightly a-jar, and beheld the two females going up to a small, blue hackney coach, with red blinds, which they had left at the corner of the *Rue St. Louis*.

They got into the carriage, and set off with the blinds still down.

"Well," said Monsieur Godet, folding his arms, and shaking his

head with a most triumphant air, "well, here's something new at all events."

And the inquisitives began to recapitulate all the momentous events which had succeeded one another since the morning—

1st. The letter, which smelt of musk.

2nd. The old, bewildered-looking woman who brought the tortoise shell casket, inlaid with gold.

"Thirdly, and last," added the widow Lebœuf, "the young woman who snivelled as she went by the gate of Robin of the Woods, *alias* the Vampire."

"Hang me if she was not a pretty creature," observed Monsieur Godet.

"Do you call *her* pretty?" rejoined the widow, bridling up; "why she has not a bit of graceful carriage about her."

"I'd lay a wager," exclaimed Godet after a few minutes' reflection, "that she's the woman who uses scents, and does not pay the postage of her letters."

"The English woman! Pshaw, Monsieur Godet," replied the widow, shrugging her shoulders with an air of contemptuous superiority, "you cannot have seen her style of dress. *That* an Englishwoman! nonsense; there is nothing more easy to recognise than an Englishwoman; you have only to look at her dress; it is simple enough in all conscience. A straw bonnet all the year through; a pink spencer; a Scotch plaid petticoat, and bright green, or lemon-coloured boots; you may see the costume any day, in *Les Anglaises pour rire*, at the *Variétés*. We all know that it is an old vaudeville, and it would not be publicly acted, unless it were authentic. I repeat it once more, ever since this world has been a world, Englishwomen, real, genuine Englishwomen, have never been differently dressed."

Unfortunately Madame Lebœuf's observations and maxims upon the monography of Englishwomen were interrupted by the abrupt entrance of two strangers.

The inquisitives stared with increased curiosity at these two new comers, who were evidently as much out of their element in the *Marais*, as the charming young female, whose portrait we just now sketched.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### INVESTIGATIONS.

THE two strangers were both young, and elegantly dressed. Although the cold was intense, neither of them was disfigured by one of those abominable sacks, so clumsy an imitation of the English

sailor's pea jacket, and which have been christened *paletots* by the French tailors.

The younger of the two gentlemen was fair, slender, and of pleasing appearance. He wore over his other clothes, a white, wadded, full cut great coat. The bow of his black satin cravat was fastened by a small turquoise pin ; his trowsers were light blue, fitted him closely, and descended gracefully upon a brilliantly polished boot.

The other stranger was a dark, older man, and of fashionable appearance ; like his companion, he wore a bronze-coloured frock coat with velvet collar, and facings of the same shade, but what the tailors call *écrasé*. His trowsers were light grey, and not long enough to hide a remarkably well formed foot in a laced boot of black casimir ; a fancy cravat, reddish, with large white stripes, set off marvellously well, his dark complexion and hair.

We have entered into these somewhat trivial details, because they will account for the eager and almost savage curiosity with which the two strangers were examined by the frequenters of the *Café Lebœuf*.

The younger of the two, who, as we have before said, was fair and of most distinguished appearance, seemed to be under the influence of some strong emotion.

He took off his hat on coming in, sat down with an air almost of dejection, at one of the tables in the *Café*, and leaned his head between his two hands, which, by the bye, were covered with a pair of irreproachable gloves of *peau de Suède*.

"Deuce take it," said his friend (whom we will call Alfred) "deuce take it, Gaston, pray compose yourself ; you must have made a mistake ; it could not have been her."

"Not her !" replied Gaston, lifting up his head with an impatient movement, and smiling bitterly. "Not her ! What ! do you maintain that I am mistaken, when, even at a masked ball, I should recognise her among a thousand women, merely by her walk, merely by that inexplicable something, which belongs to her alone ? Nonsense, Alfred, you treat me like a child ! I repeat it, I saw her get out of her carriage, and into a hackney coach, a little blue hackney coach, with red blinds, and that confounded Madame Blondeau was with her, and carried the casket."

On hearing these words, which the young man had spoken in a tolerably loud voice, the frequenters of the *Café Lebœuf* were unable to restrain a thrill of joy.

Monsieur Godet said, in a low voice, to his fellow conspirators—

"Do you hear that ? The casket ! the casket ! He is, no doubt, talking of the one which the old woman took to the Vampire's servant just now. Bravo ! the plot thickens ; it is becoming quite interesting ; let us be all ears. Give me a newspaper ; I will manage to sneak skilfully near these two gentlemen, who, in my opinion, are gallants of the first water."

Thus speaking, he approached the table at which the two young

men were conversing; who, however, becoming aware that they were objects of attention, and annoyed at Monsieur Godet's proximity, continued their conversation, in English, to the great disappointment of the inquisitives.

"But what was this casket?" asked Alfred.

"A casket which she had made me a present of, and which my servant has been fool enough to give up to this Madame Blondeau, thinking that the old lady had been sent by me." This morning, on my return home, Pierre told me this pretty performance of his; I was so astonished, that I hastened to *her* house, but *she* was gone out. I then met you on the Pont-Royal, before the *pavillon de Flore*, and while we were talking, I saw her, as plainly as I see you at this moment, get into a little, blue hackney coach, with Madame Blondeau, on the other side of the bridge. The coach set off; we had just time to cross the bridge; while you watched the direction the carriage was taking, I hurried off to the *rue du Bac* for a hack cab; I brought it up to you; we got in, and pursued the little hackney coach as far as the entrance of the *rue du Temple*. We have explored every street for the last hour; but have failed in lighting once more upon the little hackney coach."

"But what the deuce do you think can have brought her to such a wilderness as this *Marais*? You told me yourself, that she does not know a soul here. Come, come, I again repeat you have made a mistake. Well, well, have it your own way," said Alfred, who observed a fresh movement of impatience on the part of his friend; no doubt it *was* her you saw; but, even then, between ourselves I cannot understand your ill humour and uneasiness. It was only yesterday that you told me yourself, that you were desirous of breaking off this connection, in short, that your marriage——"

"Of course I was desirous of breaking it off; and for the last two months I have secretly been paving the way for a separation; but I had a thousand reasons to act with delicacy, and it is odious to be thus anticipated. That casket contained her letters, and I am miserable at being deprived of it. It is a part of my system never to give back women's letters; one never knows what may happen."

"But how came Pierre then, to part with the casket?"

"Why, because that infernal Blondeau came as if from me to ask him for it, telling him that I was at her Mistress's house. Pierre, who had seen the Blondeau come a hundred times with letters, or on some confidential mission, had of course no reasons for distrusting her, and believed the story she told."

"*She*, of course was aware that her letters were in the casket?"

"Certainly; for *she* had herself given me the casket to keep them in. I had the key of it, and knew the secret drawer, and I always kept it in my bed-room, but not locked up, as I have full confidence in Pierre."

"But my dear Gaston, when I reflect, it appears inexplicable that, instead of quietly keeping the casket at her own house, she

she should thus have conveyed it, God knows where."

"*She* was afraid to keep it."

"*She* afraid ! I hope it was not her husband's jealousy that frightened her," said Alfred, who could not repress a smile.

"I cannot tell you any more," answered Gaston who appeared suddenly much embarrassed, and coloured up to the eyes. "However, *she* has reasons for thinking that the casket would be much more secure any where else than in her own house."

Alfred looked at Gaston with astonishment, and answered—

"That alters the case ; of course I believe you, but let the worst come to the worst, it is only, after all, an involuntary return of her letters, and I do not see ——"

"No, you do not know all ; on those letters of *hers* there were written annotations of my own and another woman's, a kind of running commentary on my connection with *her*. Yes, I confess it, it was a kind of braggadocio, an exaggerated parody of the *roués* of the Regency, remarkable alike for brutality and bad taste ; I am disgusted at it myself now, and could curse my own folly, in having given way to such coarse absurdity ; for if *she* chooses, and I confess I have treated *her* sufficiently ill, to justify her in so doing, she has it in her power to do me an irreparable mischief. I am well acquainted with her powers of mind and firmness of purpose ; and you yourself know the immense influence *she* exercises in the world. Alas ! Alfred, with all my pretensions to tact and cleverness, I have acted like a schoolboy, or a fool ; and I am now at *her* mercy !"

"Calm yourself, my dear Gaston. It is quite sufficient to wait for repentance, without hurrying to meet it half way. Do not exaggerate your difficulties ; you may have acted ill towards *her*, but that is not the point at issue. The question is, if this fault of yours can prove injurious to yourself, and for my part, I think not. *She* is esteemed generous and proud ; in former days you yourself was never weary of extolling the good qualities of her heart, and you always maintained that *she* was incapable of a treacherous or malicious action."

"And what of that ? You know as well as I do, that it is precisely characters like hers, which sometimes suffer the most acutely under, are most bitterly irritated by, and revenge themselves most cruelly for conduct so perfidious as mine. For two years she has never given me a cause for complaint, and yet I have often afforded her well grounded motives of jealousy ; hers is one of those stubborn natures which ever receive you with a smile, and would die sooner than you should discover the tears they have swallowed down. This is, certainly, irritating to one's vanity ; but except this, I have no reproaches to make her. If you had not set before me the advantages of this marriage, which will put me in possession of one hundred and fifty thousand francs per annum, besides expectations, I should most decidedly have continued the *liaison*, if not

from the extreme pleasure it afforded me, at least because it had grown into an agreeable habitude ; and, after all, there was nothing troublesome in our intercourse ; I found it very convenient, and we know what we leave, but do *not* know what we are going to take."

"That is all very well, my dear Gaston ; you reason marvellously ; yours is the very quintessence of egotism, and all your conduct hitherto has exhaled a most adorable odour of selfishness. Do not, then, be led away by terrors which have no foundation ; you were desirous of breaking off the *liaison* ; well, this rape of the casket is a flagrant *casus belli*. As to the *annotations*, as you call them, which she will find upon her letters, a woman of her station—a woman who has so much self-respect as she has, would never, for the sake of revenge, run the risk of ruining herself and of making it appear that she had been sacrificed to some — upon my word, I neither ask nor care to whom. Once for all, my good friend, take my word for it, all this could not have happened better. God bless my soul !" he continued after a moment's silence, and as if struck by a sudden idea, perhaps she merely drove to the bank of the river, in order to make a present to the fishes of the unlucky casket."

"What nonsense, Alfred ; she might, if that was all, have quietly burned the letters at her own house, and said nothing more about it. Once for all, she is keeping them for some mischievous purpose."

"Mischief, indeed !" replied Alfred, shrugging his shoulders impatiently, "why what would these letters prove, after all ? That you have treated her ill—that you have sacrificed her ? Well, and who the devil ever takes the part of a woman that has been sacrificed ? You may subject a woman to the most odious ill usage, you may publicly treat her with the most atrocious brutality, and then her own intimate friends will cry out upon the house tops, that the wretch has only got what she deserved ; and moreover, other men will envy your brutal insolence without the courage to imitate it, just as a petty pick-pocket admires an assassin".

"I tell you," rejoined Gaston, "that you do not know *her*."

Observing the paleness and agitation of his friend, Alfred said, and this time in French—

"Come, Gaston, compose yourself ; remember we entered this abominable pot-house to rest ourselves for a minute or two, and to get a glass of water."

"You are right," answered Gaston, looking round him ; "but everything here looks so dirty, that I doubt our being able to procure even a glass of tolerable water."

This impertinent observation increased the anger of Madame Lebœuf and her customers, who were already much incensed at not being able to take a part in the conversation of the strangers, which had been carried on in English.

"A glass of *eau sucrée*, Madame, if you please," said Gaston to the widow.

Madame Leboeuf, without answering, majestically put her hand to a broken bell, and cried out in a shrill voice—

"Boitard, Boitard, a glass of *eau sucrée*."

"What a horrid smell of frying-pans," observed Gaston, putting his hand to his forehead, "my very brain seems on fire."

"Not to mention," added Alfred with a look of disgust, "a certain indescribable musty smell of old fellows, which makes the air actually pestiferous."

"Madame, I asked for a glass of water," said Gaston, in an impatient tone.

"Well, sir, and I think I rang pretty loudly for Boitard, to bring it," was the widow's sulky answer as she again tinkled the bell.

"After all, Gaston, Madame is right; she *did* ring for Boitard," said Alfred, looking as serious as a judge; "for heaven's sake do have a little patience. But as I am rather distrustful of the pleasure Boitard's presence will confer, I shall, by way of precaution, take the liberty of lighting a cigar."

Accordingly, Alfred drew a cigar from a Lima straw case, took a fusee from a little silver inlaid box, and began to smoke.

The frequenters of the Café exchanged looks of stupefaction, and did not know in what light to regard so novel and audacious a proceeding. Some of them coughed; others cleared their throats with an energetic kind of *a-hem*, and had it not been for the curiosity excited by the strangers, who seemed to be somehow or other concerned in the casket given to the Vampire's servant, no doubt, the widow and her party would have loudly protested against such tap-room behaviour.

At this moment, Boitard, the chubby cheeked waiter, made his appearance, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, for to him the dog-days lasted all the year through.

He carried, upon a worn out tea-board, a decanter, a glass about two inches thick, and five pieces of sugar, in a cracked saucer.

While Gaston appeared plunged in deep meditations, Alfred, with his two hands in his pockets, was examining the glass of water with a half distrustful, half disgusted air, and suddenly exclaimed—

"Why, my good Boitard, there is a spider in your decanter; that is more than we asked for. We are in a great hurry, and merely wish for a plain glass of water, *minus spiders*, if possible."

Boitard scratched his head with his great mutton hand, attentively examined the decanter, and discovered that the spider was effectually there.

Instead of being overcome by this abominable discovery, he half turned round towards the widow and her party, and shrugged his shoulders, a motion which appeared to signify, "Upon my word this is a pretty delicate sort of chap, to care about a spider," to which the widow and the inquisitives replied by another pantomime, intended to imply, "Oh! for heaven's sake, Boitard, don't mention it; what pitiable affectation!"

Then Boitard having indulged in another shrug, took the de-

canter in one hand, and thrusting his great, filthy fingers down the neck, commenced a novel style of fishing.

His piscatorial proceedings were completely successful. Boitard drew out the spider, took it delicately between his thumb and fore finger, and crushed it with his foot ; he then, with admirable *sang froid*, replaced the decanter upon the table, and said to Alfred, as if he were reproving a spoilt child for some foolish whim—

“ Well, sir, I hope you will confess that there are no spiders in the water now.”

Alfred had contemplated Boitard's proceedings with profound admiration, and thought his last speech actually sublime. He put a five franc piece into the waiter's hand, saying to him—

“ That is for you, Boitard ; perfection in anything deserves a reward, and in your peculiar department, my good fellow, you are a magnificent specimen of dirt.”

Boitard stared with stupefaction at Alfred, the money, the widow, and the customers, in turn.

Gaston, still immersed in his reflections, muttered to himself, “ What shall I do—what shall I do ? Where the devil has that casket got to by this time ? ” And he mechanically extended his hand towards the decanter.

“ Deuce take it, don't touch that, Gaston,” said Alfred ; and he described the spider-fishing to his friend.

Gaston pushed back the board with horror, and impatiently exclaimed—

“ One cannot even drink a glass of water when one's very head and throat are on fire. Come along, Alfred, let us see if we can't find some place that is a little less disgusting.”

The widow's wrath boiled over at these words, and she indignantly exclaimed, addressing herself to Alfred—

“ In the first place, sir, I beg you to understand that people don't smoke here as they do in a public-house ; and next, I wish to inform you, in spite of your jeering looks, that if *you* don't choose to drink, what you are served with here, you have no business to attempt making other people as particular as yourself.”

Alfred answered with profound gravity—

“ Be assured, my dear Madame, that I have not, in this instance, abused any influence I may possess over my friend ; and I solemnly declare to you that when he follows his own inclination, he never eats spiders.”

“ Come along,” said Gaston, throwing a *louis* upon the bar ; “ the woman is mad.”

The widow contemptuously pushed back the piece of gold, exclaiming, “ that in her establishment people only paid for what they had consumed.”

“ I have already paid the rascal for his spider, observed Alfred to Gaston ; the latter pocketed his *louis*, and the two young men left the Café.

Scarcely had they closed the Café door, when Monsieur Godet, bareheaded, in spite of the cold, set off after them.

"Will you have your hat Monsieur Godet?" said the widow, who guessed the intentions of her customer.

"I don't want my hat," answered Godet; "I'll very soon bring you back these fine sparks bound hand and foot, and as tractable as lambs."

A couple of strides brought him up to the young men, and he gently touched Alfred's sleeve who inspired him with more confidence than the other.

"What do you want, sir?" enquired Alfred, astonished at Godet's grotesque figure.

"I want, sir, to render you an immense service, if I am able to do so, as one good citizen always ought to do to another; and I propose to you to make a league among us against the common enemy, which common enemy aforesaid happens at this moment to be Robin of the Woods *alias* the Vampire".

Gaston and Alfred stared at Monsieur Godet, without comprehending a single syllable of this strange gibberish.

At last Gaston said to his friend—

"Come along Alfred; don't you see all these people are mad?"

"This one looks too great a fool to be mad," was Alfred's reply.

Monsieur Godet, fearing that his prey would escape him, took no notice of these observations, and continued as fast as he could, and with an air of mystery—

"I know all about it; you are looking for a young lady who was with an elderly female in a little blue hackney coach, with red blinds. A black bonnet, puce-coloured cloak, grey hair; that's the old woman's description; fair hair, black eyebrows and eyes; that's the young one's."

"It must be them!" exclaimed Gaston, and then recovering his *sang froid*, he said to Monsieur Godet, who was maliciously enjoying his triumph—

"Exactly, sir, I am somewhat concerned to know in what direction the persons whom you mention proceeded."

"And," rejoined Monsieur Godet, "you would particularly like to be informed where they have taken the little tortoiseshell casket, inlaid with gold, to; wouldn't you, sir?"

"How do you know anything about that?" replied Gaston, more and more astonished.

"I can only declare upon my honour," answered Monsieur Godet, "that the old woman in question, scarcely an hour ago, in my presence, gave the casket to the Vampire's servant."

This piece of information was so utterly unexpected, and so surprising, that the two young men could not believe it.

A thousand opposite feelings—uneasiness, anger, jealousy, revenge, curiosity, struggled for mastery in Gaston's bosom.

"Sir," he exclaimed, actually pale with emotion, "you must, this instant, tell me who this person is, you call the Vampire, and where he lives."

"Well, that's a pretty modest request, my good friend," thought to himself, Monsieur Godet, who was, by no means, disposed to give up his victims so soon. He pointed to his bald head, and replied,

"You will be good enough to remark, gentlemen, that at my age, the spring time of life has long fled ; if you choose to return to the Café Lebœuf, we might converse without being frozen."

"As you like, sir," replied Gaston, who impatiently retraced his steps to the widow's Café.

Never was Roman conqueror, dragging in triumph, a nation of slaves behind his chariot, more proud, than was Monsieur Godet, when he once more made his appearance in the widow's Café, followed by the two strangers. He made a sign to the inquisitives to restrain their curiosity, and withdrew with his prey into a corner of the Café. Godet took good care not to inform the young men of the Colonel's name at once, and in spite of their impatience, they were obliged to undergo the infliction of all the absurd stories that had been fabricated by the president of the Café idlers.

Had it not been for the clearness and precision of the facts which this merciless Paul Pry had already revealed, Gaston would not have believed a single word he said ; he was, however, compelled to hear the whole story of the charge of dust shot ; the carriage, which was such a magnificent turn out ; the Colonel's uniform, and the crowning iniquity of his sacrilegious expeditions to the cemetery of Père la Chaise.

Disengaged from all this nonsense, the Colonel's mode of living appeared, nevertheless, an extraordinary one to the two strangers.

"Now then, sir," said Gaston, "I have the honour to ask you, for the twentieth time, to be good enough to inform me where the residence of this man is situated. All the details you have given us are, no doubt, vastly interesting ; but once for all, the Colonel's address is what I ask you for."

"Follow me, gentlemen," replied Godet, suddenly rising, with an imposing air.

He opened the Café door, and with his finger pointed out to Gaston, the little door of the *hôtel D'Orbesson*.

"There, sir ; that's the Vampire's house opposite ; the door with the wicket."

Gaston rushed towards the door, without saying a word.

Monsieur Godet re-closed the Café door, and rubbing his hands with a kind of diabolical joy, exclaimed—

"The plot thickens, gentlemen, the plot thickens ; and now let us hurry back to our peep-holes."

The Café idlers, accordingly placed themselves once more at their posts of observation.

Gaston rang the bell violently, and the Colonel's old servant showed himself, not at the door, but at the wicket.

The two young men made, to all appearance, the most strenuous efforts to obtain admittance ; they seemed even to employ menaces as well as entreaties ; but all was a waste of breath. Gaston was obliged to content himself with pushing, through the wicket, his card, upon which he had hastily scribbled a few words with a pencil.

Perceiving that the conversation over the way was rather a warm one, Monsieur Godet slightly opened the door of the Café, and distinctly heard Gaston exclaim, in an angry voice—

“ At nine o'clock to-morrow morning ; and I hope, then, there will be no shuffling excuses.”

The two young men then departed with such hasty steps, that they were soon out of sight.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RENDEZVOUS.

NEXT morning, at nine o'clock, Gaston's carriage drew up before the *hôtel D'Orbesson*. The footman rang the bell ; the little door was opened, and the old servant made his appearance.

“ Is Colonel Ulric at home ?” said Gaston.

The servant bowed without speaking and led the way before the two young men.

You could conceive nothing more melancholy and desolate than the interior of that vast mansion. Several large flag-stones, the remains, no doubt, of some long destroyed building, were lying here and there, half concealed by the grass which had taken possession of the yard ; they were like tomb-stones in a forsaken cemetery.

All the windows were closed outside, and the spacious vaulted stair-case re-echoed lugubriously, the creaking of the glass hall door, on its rusty hinges.

The Colonel's apartments were on the ground floor.

The servant conducted the two young men into an immense, but scarcely furnished drawing room, whose lofty windows with small panes, and without curtains, looked into a garden enclosed by lofty walls, and as melancholy as the garden of a cloister.

The servant disappeared, after having announced to the visitors that the Colonel would be with them immediately.

It was a gloomy, overcast day, and the wind sighed mournfully through the badly closed doors. Everything in that mansion betrayed, not poverty or neglect ; but the most profound indifference to the common comforts of life.

Alfred and Gaston exchanged looks for some time in silence. At last the former observed, shivering with cold as he did so—

“ Ever since we came in here, I feel as if I had a cape of iced lead

on my shoulders. Not a spark of fire to be seen ; the man must be a thorough bred Spartan."

" Who can this man be ?" said Gaston, talking to himself.

" *She* is the only one who could have informed you ; but she went away last night."

" Yes, last night ;" replied Gaston.

" Ulric !" continued Alfred " Ulric ; that sounds like a Russian, Prussian, or German name. I went yesterday to the *Union* club, and questioned several members of the *corps diplomatique*, such as secretaries of legation, attachés to the various embassies, *et cetera*, *et cetera* ; but none of them knew such a man as Colonel Ulric. Our only remaining chance of getting any information would be from the Russian Ambassador ; but I was unable to meet with him."

" After all, what does it signify ?" observed Gaston. " This man is in possession of my secret ; she has, doubtless, sacrificed me to him ; it is a black piece of treachery ; I will either kill, or be killed by him."

" Gently, my good fellow ; perhaps that fool gave us incorrect information yesterday. Certainly, there is every appearance of *her* having brought the casket here herself ; but you must observe that she did not come in, but that it was Madame Blondeau who delivered it to the servant ; in short, Gaston, I leave it to your own good sense ; you are too much a man of the world, and too well used to these sort of affairs, to act like a child ; the matter is, unquestionably, of importance, and our best plan will be, to be guided by circumstances as they arise."

" What irritates me most," exclaimed Gaston, " is that woman's inconceivable falsity ! I esteemed her as incapable, I do not say of a lie, but even of the slightest dissimulation, and yet it is to this man, whose name even she never pronounced in my presence, it is to him that she has confided. By heavens, there is some odious mystery here which I am impatient to fathom."

" All that gossiping fellow told us yesterday about the Colonel's mode of life is strange enough," said Alfred, " and we may at all events conjecture from it that he is a most extraordinary being. The aspect of ruin too, which everything wears here, does not prophesy a particularly charming disposition in the owner, and without my sympathy for your anxieties, I should be delighted at an interview with Robin of the Woods, or the Vampire, as those good people call him ; but this cold is perfectly intolerable, and if the devil is really the master of this house, he ought at least to allow a little of his superfluous heat to be reflected here, out of consideration for his visitors."

At that instant a door was thrown open by the servant, and the Colonel entered the room. He was a tall, plainly dressed man, apparently about thirty-six years of age, although his dark hair was already tinged with grey about the temples. His complexion was

swarthy in the extreme, and the deep furrow which divided his black, straight, and strongly marked eyebrows, gave a stern and haughty expression to his features, which, however, were regularly formed, and might, perhaps, in times long gone by, have been capable of expressing the softer feelings of our nature. He cast his eyes upon Gaston's card, which he held in his hand, and addressing both the young men at once, he said, in a firm, distinct voice, in which no foreign accent was perceptible—

"Count Gaston de Senneville?"

"That is my name, sir," answered Gaston, who, at the same time, introduced his friend as the Marquis de Baudricourt.

The Colonel, for the second time, slightly inclined his head, and then crossing his hands behind his back, and looking Gaston full in the face, he stood waiting for the Count to explain the object of his visit.

Gaston was embarrassed for a moment, in spite of his natural assurance and his familiarity with the world.

Not one of the Colonel's harsh and swarthy features moved; you might have supposed he wore a mask of brass, and his large, grey eyes had a certain clear, fixed, penetrating look, which, after some time, it became almost impossible to endure.

There are some kinds of silence which it is very difficult to interrupt. Whether Alfred was waiting for Gaston to speak, or Gaston was waiting for the Colonel, all three remained mute for several minutes.

It was then that Gaston, for the first time, felt the difficulty of explaining the object of his visit, without disgracing the woman of whose conduct he fancied he had just reason to complain, and thus, as often occurs, at the moment when the explanation for which he was so anxious, was imminent, the Count was assailed by a thousand different reflections, which should have suggested themselves to his mind before his visit to the Colonel. He actually coloured with embarrassment, vexation and anger, and Alfred, desirous of bringing this disagreeable scene to an end, said to the Colonel—

"Of course, sir, you know the object of our present visit?"

"I do not, sir," was Ulric's reply.

"We have come, sir," exclaimed Gaston, "about a casket, which is my property, and which was given to you yesterday, by a woman, with whom you, no doubt, are acquainted, as she was only the emissary of another female, who cannot be unknown to you."

"I do not know what you mean, sir," answered the Colonel.

"Sir!" said Gaston, impetuously.

"Sir!" replied the Colonel, without raising his voice.

There was another pause, and Gaston bit his lips with vexation. Alfred, however, said with great *sang froid*—

"It is of the utmost importance to Monsieur de Senneville, to find out whether a certain casket, which is his property, and which contains some papers of importance, was, or was not, delivered to

you yesterday afternoon ? If you will be kind enough sir, to give him your word of honour, that the casket in question has not been, or is not now in your possession, Monsieur de Senneville will declare himself perfectly satisfied."

"I will not declare myself satisfied, unless—" began Gaston, when the Marquis interrupted him, by saying—

"My good fellow, as you have selected me for your adviser, pray allow me to come to an explanation with this gentleman."

"That explanation, gentlemen, will be a very simple one," replied the Colonel, who took a step or two towards the door, as if to show that any further questioning would be perfectly useless. "I have no answer to give."

"So, sir," exclaimed Gaston, you decline giving your word that—"

"I refuse, sir," said the Colonel, who took another step towards the door, "to answer those questions which I cannot allow to be either necessary or proper."

"Pray, sir," said Alfred, whose patience was nearly worn out, "does that movement of yours towards the door imply that this conversation has lasted too long ?"

"Too long, perhaps ; but certainly, long enough," replied the Colonel, putting his hand on the lock of the door. "I have nothing to say, or to hear."

"And I, sir," exclaimed Gaston, "declare to you that I will not leave your house till you have answered my question ; is that casket here, or is it not ?"

"One word, sir, I entreat," said Alfred, who appeared desirous of exhausting the whole arsenal of peaceful expedients. "You, sir, are a man of the world, and we as men of the world, have had recourse to you ; this resolution was taken by us, after well grounded information had reached us—information which made it certain that the casket in question was delivered, if not to you, sir, at least to one of your servants. If this circumstance has not come to your knowledge, be good enough to question your servant."

"It would be useless to do so, sir, said the Colonel."

"Then by Heavens," exclaimed Gaston, stamping with fury, "we must—"

"Stop, Gaston ; one word more," said Alfred, and then he added—

"As you decline, sir, this mode of clearing up the business, you take the whole responsibility of the matter upon yourself. Once more for the last time, we appeal to your honour to vouchsafe us a positive answer. Monsieur de Senneville would be sorry to exceed the limits of moderation, and you, sir, are of too high a station in society to receive with incivility a question that is put to you with politeness."

"I have already had the honour, gentlemen, of telling you twice

that I have no answer to give on the subject," replied the Colonel, as calmly and coldly as ever.

Alfred and Gaston exchanged a look of indignation

"It is evident," said the Marquis, that we cannot force you into an explanation, but—"

"It is useless, sir," interrupted Gaston with firmness, "to protract this interview any further; your refusal to answer is a confession that you are in possession of the casket; I have reasons for looking upon that possession of yours, as an insult to me, and for that insult, therefore, I require satisfaction from you."

"Very well, sir," replied the Colonel, opening the door of the drawing-room.

"This gentleman," continued Gaston, pointing to the Marquis, "will be kind enough to come in the course of the day, in order to settle matters with your second."

"That will not be required, sir," said the Colonel; "we can this minute decide upon time, place, and arms."

"Very well, sir," replied Gaston; "ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Ten o'clock," repeated the Colonel.

"Near the pheasant preserve, in the *bois de Vincennes*."

"In the *bois de Vincennes*," repeated the Colonel.

"As for arms, sir," continued Gaston, "be kind enough to name your own."

"I have no choice, sir."

"Swords, then, sir."

"Swords be it," replied the Colonel, shutting the door after the two young men, without the slightest emotion of feature or voice.

The old servant conducted the two young men out, and the *Hôtel D'Orbesson* returned to its silence and solitude.

The inquisitives of the *Café Lebœuf*, who had been on the look-out all the morning, had seen the two young men enter the house.

When they came out, and were about to get into their carriage, Monsieur Godet, goaded on by his insatiable curiosity, opened the *Café* door, went up, without his hat, to Gaston, and said to him, with a mixture of mystery and familiarity—

"Well, young man, did we get on pretty well? As you have managed to penetrate into the Vampire's den, you might as well give us a description of its interior. Did he give you back the pretty lady's casket? I hope you snubbed the old fellow nicely."

Alfred and Gaston got into the carriage without answering Monsieur Godet's questions; the footman shut the door, cried out, "Home," to the coachman, and the inquisitive was left alone with his disappointment.

"Impertinent coxcomb!" exclaimed Monsieur Godet; "he was a

devilish deal more polite yesterday, when he was trying to get at my secret. Never mind, they both looked pale and irritated, and that is, at all events, something gained."

Monsieur Godet, on his return to the Café, was overwhelmed with questions, to which he replied, with an air of importance—

"The gentlemen only had time to give me a few details, and to thank me for my politeness. All will be cleared up to-morrow."

This excuse, which happened to be the truth, was perfectly well received by the frequenters of the Café, and they looked forward with impatience to the morrow.

Effectually, that day was, indeed, a great one for the inquisitives of the Café Lebœuf.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the Colonel's servant went out by himself, and returned about an hour afterwards, with two infantry soldiers in a hackney coach.

"Halloo!" exclaimed Monsieur Godet, who was already at his post, "he has been to fetch the guard, to protect his master, I suppose, against the two young men. The Vampire, it seems, is not a *Cœur de Lion*."

"If it were the guard," observed one of the others, "the soldiers would have their guns and cartridge boxes; but you see they have only got their swords."

"That is true enough; but what the deuce are the soldiers wanted for, if it is not to defend the Vampire?"

The discussion had arrived at this point, when the door of the *Hôtel D'Orbesson* was opened, and the Colonel, who was wrapped up in a large cloak, came out and got into the hackney coach with the two soldiers.

When the carriage was gone, the old servant, instead of immediately re-entering the house, as was his wont, stopped for a few moments on the threshold of the door, and gave an uneasy look in the direction which the carriage had taken; he then withdrew after having closed the door with a bang.

All these various movements did not escape the spies of the Café Lebœuf, and they were sorely puzzled at the Colonel's proceedings. Where the deuce could he be going to, with those two soldiers?

The widow observed that she had fancied she saw a sword-sheath sticking out from under the Colonel's cloak, but she could not be certain of the fact.

"A sword!" exclaimed Monsieur Godet, rubbing his hands with pleasure; "capital! I have no doubt you are right, and perhaps there is a duel in the wind with those two coxcombs whom we saw yesterday. Upon my word, it is becoming quite amusing, and we shall have our money's worth after all, hurrah!"

"If there should be a duel!" exclaimed the revengeful widow "I would give something myself that the great puppy who made such a fuss about a miserable spider, should be laid up with a good wound of some sort or other."

"And I, too, my dear Madame Lebœuf, who have not much to thank those two coxcombs for, in the way of politeness and gratitude, join with you in wishing that they may meet with something particularly disagreeable. But if a duel were in hand, there would be seconds required."

"Well—those two soldiers?"

"Nonsense, my dear Madame Lebœuf; the Vampire is a Colonel, and he would never condescend to take a couple of common soldiers for seconds. It would be an infringement of all military discipline. Halloo! what the deuce is that servant about again at the threshold of the door?" added Monsieur Godet, looking through the window; that is the third time since his master went away, that he has stuck himself there, as upright as a milestone. There is something unnatural about all this; he looks very uneasy; I have half a mind to go and ask him some questions."

"You could not do so at a worse time, Monsieur Godet," remonstrated the widow. "Don't go and expose yourself to the brutal insults of that old wretch."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed Godet, clapping his nose close to the window again; "I hear the noise of a carriage."

Effectually it was the carriage, bringing back the Colonel and the two soldiers.

Colonel Ulric jumped actively out of the carriage, said a few words to the two soldiers, shook hands with them, and dismissed them.

Madame Lebœuf declared afterwards, that she had seen the old servant drop a tear while he was closing the little gate after his master.

Unfortunately for the idlers of the Café Lebœuf these two days, which had been so fruitful in events of various kinds, were succeeded by weeks of the most uninteresting monotony.

Neither letter, casket, or carriage appeared again; the basket of provisions was brought every morning as usual, and that was all.

They repeated the experiment of the ashes in the alley, and found that the Vampire still continued his nightly expeditions, and Monsieur Godet, though no longer ambitious of bearing a share in them, had no doubt that their object was still the cemetery of Père la Chaise.

The only event which re-awakened, for an instant, the curiosity of the idlers, was, the appearance of the old woman, who had brought the casket. About two months after the Colonel's duel, this woman came again to the *Hôtel d'Orbesson*, and delivered a parcel, of tolerable bulk, to the servant.

After that she was seen no more.

We will now, therefore, relate this last visit paid by Madame Blondeau, to Colonel Ulric.

## CHAPTER V.

### COLONEL ULRIC.

MADAME BLONDEAU was introduced by the old servant into the great drawing-room, where the Colonel had received Gaston and Alfred, two months before. We may add that Stok (the ancient domestic was thus named) had lost his former, forbidding expression of countenance.

"How is the Colonel, Monsieur Stok?"

"Still the same, Madame. Blondeau; an iron body, but a feeble head—sometimes my poor master spends whole days in weeping like a child—to think that *he*, of all men, should weep!—had any one told me this a year ago, I should not have believed it—and then scarcely a night passes—"

Here Stok paused with a sigh.

"Good God! What, still at the cemetery!" exclaimed Madame Blondeau.

"Yes, Madame, always there—it is enough to break one's heart."

"And how does he spend the rest of his time, Monsieur Stok?"

"In giving himself up to the deepest and gloomiest reveries, or in walking up and down the little paved room which he inhabits, and which is a hundred times more cold and damp than all the rest, for it used to be a bath room. Well, my master appears to have chosen that very room precisely on account of its being the worst in the mansion. I will tell you what it is, Madame Blondeau; there is one little circumstance, which, childish as it is in appearance, brings, nevertheless, the tears into my eyes whenever I see it."

"What is that, Monsieur Stok?"

"Why, during the six months that we have inhabited this mansion, my master, by constantly walking in this little room, from the door to the window, and the window to the door, has so worn the pavement of the floor, that you may actually see the indentations in it which his footsteps have made."

"Horrible, indeed! Merciful God, what an existence!"

"Alas! Madame Blondeau, you would say that his mind is so thoroughly concentrated upon one idea, that everything else, even cold and hunger, find him insensible. He would not remember to eat, were I not to remind him of meal times. Even during the severe frosts we have had this winter, he would not have a fire lighted, which is a whim of his that I cannot understand. Moreover,

Madame Blondeau, I will tell you something that will surprise you. Every day, for the last thirty years, my master has always permitted me, in accordance with an old custom we have in Hungary, to kiss his hand when I leave his presence, which, according to our ideas, is a mark of attachment and respect. Well, would you believe it, in spite of the severe cold, his poor hand is always dry and hot, as if he was suffering under a high fever. And yet no change takes place in him, which I can easily conceive, as his constitution is such a powerful one. Some twelve years ago, in our campaigns against the Turks, I have seen him remain on horseback for twenty and thirty hours together without eating, and merely take now and then a little snow from his horse's mane, to quench his thirst with, nor did I ever hear him utter a complaint. When wounded he would smile as I hastened up to him, and a smile so gentle and sweet, that it comforted me in spite of my fears. Alas ! I have not seen that smile on his lips for a year. He sees nobody, and pays no visits. Once, only, he went to the Russian Embassy to receive an order from his Majesty the Emperor. Ah ! Madame Blondeau, it was quite a treat for me to see him put on his uniform ; he looked so handsome in it, and it brought so many, many circumstances to my mind ! I was quite surprised at his asking for his uniform ; but he told me he was going to the Embassy, to receive a letter of the Emperor's, and I could understand that in such a case, he considered that *costume* a proper mark of respect, the Emperor was always so good to him, and the Colonel was so much attached to his Majesty ! Since that day, my master has never been out, except for that duel."

" Ah ! that duel, that duel, Monsieur Stok, when I think that it was occasioned by that unlucky casket."

" I cannot say, my good Madame, that the duel itself gave me much uneasiness, for I was well acquainted with my master's skill and strength. He had shewn himself superior to the most famous French swordsmen, who had visited Russia, and yet, in spite of myself, I kept fidgetting backwards and forwards at the door, and my poor old heart actually leaped with joy, when I saw him return with the two soldiers, whom he had sent me to fetch for seconds, from the barracks close by. The young man got off with a sword wound, which kept him in bed for a month. The evening after the duel, my master said something which much surprised me, coming from him ; he was talking to himself, as he often does, and muttered in a low voice—

" I do not hate that man ; I have always recoiled at the sight of blood, except in war, and yet I beheld *his* with a savage pleasure. I was about to spare him no longer, when, suddenly, the *voice* told me not to take his life, and I obeyed."

" What voice did he mean, Monsieur Stok ?"

" I do not know. Madame Blondeau ; sometimes he stops in his walks, and appears to be listening, then he presses his two hands to his forehead, and begins to walk again."

" Poor Colonel !"

"But how selfish I am," said Stok, "I talk to you of nothing but my master. How is the Viscountess?"

"She is still in Touraine, and still suffers greatly."

"Ah! Madame Blondeau, what changes and misfortunes we have witnessed during the six years of our acquaintance!"

"May God grant, Monsieur Stok, that they may be ended as regards my mistress; I dare not utter the same prayer for your master, although it is said that every sorrow has an end at last."

"Not such sorrows as his, Madame Blondeau—not such sorrows as his," replied Stok with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Can I not yet see the Colonel? I am desirous of giving this parcel into his hands, and of returning to-night by the Diligence to Tours. I am in a hurry to get back to my mistress."

"My master has not yet rung for me," answered Stok; and he added with a tone of entreaty—"a few minutes sooner or later will make no difference to you, and if you did but know what a few minutes' sleep are to my master, and what good they do him—he gets so little rest! This morning again, he came home very late."

"What an existence!" said Madame Blondeau, with a sigh.

"I should never complain," continued Stok, "if I had only my master to think about; but you cannot imagine how I am bothered by half a dozen old fools who are playing the spy upon us all day. There is not a trick which they have left unemployed to get in here, and they are constantly perched, like so many crows, upon chairs, in the Café opposite, in order to watch what is going on in our house."

"I have no doubt," said Madame Blondeau, "that it was them I saw just now all on the *qui vive*, when I knocked at your gate."

"Assuredly it was; and yet I gave a pretty sharp lesson to one of them, but all is of no avail."

At this moment a bell was rung.

"My master wants me," said Stok, "have the goodness to wait a minute, Madame Blondeau, and I will announce your visit to the Colonel."

In about a quarter of an hour, Madame Blondeau was admitted into the Colonel's room. He was standing up, and dressed in a long, dark coloured, Turkish pelisse. The low window, through which you perceived a double row of chesnut trees, with black and bare trunks, gave but a dubious light to the apartment.

The species of painful contraction which usually gave a harsh—one might almost call it a petrified—expression to the Colonel's countenance, appeared to relax a little when he beheld Madame Blondeau, and his features gradually unbent themselves.

"How is *Matilda*?" he enquired in a gentle tone, and with an expression of great kindness.

"Alas! sir," was Madame Blondeau's faltering reply; "my Lady is still in great affliction." And the poor old woman's eyes were filled with tears. "Forgive me, sir," she continued,

"but I can never hear that name pronounced, without my feelings being overcome."

"I call her thus before you, by the name of her youth, because you brought her up, and always evinced towards her the affection of a mother."

"Ah ! sir, this is more than I deserve ; I am only a servant."

"In saying so, you do justice neither to yourself nor to her. I am aware of your conduct, and am also aware that Matilda appreciates it as she ought. You are, indeed, an excellent and invaluable woman. But let me ask your business ?"

"My lady requested me to be the bearer of these papers, not liking to confide them to the risk of the post office. And she particularly desired me to tell you, sir, that she does not require an answer from you. My lady told me you are to read them when you choose. She knows——"

"Be it so," gently interrupted the Colonel, as if desirous of banishing some painful recollections ; and he placed the packet upon the table.

"And the casket ?" was his next question.

"My lady desired that I would request you to continue keeping it."

It was easy to perceive that the Colonel was in a deep fit of absence notwithstanding the very cordial manner in which he had received Madame Blondeau, and she had scarcely answered his question, when he again fell into one of his deep reveries. With his arms folded across his breast and his head hanging down, he began to pace up and down the room with slow steps, and became totally oblivious of Madame Blondeau's presence, and the poor woman, who did not dare to say a word, soon withdrew.

\* \* \* \* \*

The packet brought to the Colonel, by Madame Blondeau, from Matilda, besides a rather bulky manuscript contained the following letter :—

Château de Maran, April 15, 1838.

"I know not, my friend, how long a time will elapse before you have the courage to open this letter.

"I knew and loved—oh ! fondly loved—her whom you are mourning. I know your heart, your disposition. I know what you was to her ; I know what she was to you ; how, then, can I imagine that there is any consolation for despair like yours.

"Ulric, my friend, my brother, there beats not in this dreary world of ours a heart more devoted to you than mine. I never possessed a friend but you, and you know too well what bitter pangs I should have escaped, had I been more docile to the severe and inflexible voice of that sacred friendship. But I will not talk of myself ; let this letter be devoted to you—to you, whose heart

is such a great and noble one—to you, who realise in yourself the ideal of human goodness.

“You suffer, my friend, and your suffering is despair. The dreary abyss before you grows deeper and darker as you sound its gloom. When I heard, a year ago, of the fearful catastrophe, I fell on my knees, and prayed for *her*, but oh ! I prayed more earnestly for *you*, who survived her.

“Not for an instant did I think of writing to, or seeing you. There are wounds of the spirit which the very uselessness of consolation serves but to irritate and inflame.

“You have left everything, that you may lead, near the beloved remains of Emma, a life as cold and silent as the tomb which contains them.

“It is a strange and sublime thing, my friend, to mark how noble natures—noble, alike, in courage and heart, are gifted with the foresight of the miseries they are destined to experience.

“Three years ago, Emma said to you in joke, ‘*Ulric, what would become of you, if you were to lose me ?*’ and I fancy I can hear you even now answering her with that smile which none possess but you, and without brushing away the tears which filled your eyes—‘*I would go wherever you might be. I would live in solitude. Consolation could never reach me. Perhaps I should not even have the courage to see Matilda—Matilda—our friend—our sister.*’

“Had any one else spoken such words, they would have seemed merely melancholy or exaggerated ; but spoken by you, Ulric, they bore the impression of a desolating truthfulness.

“Both Emma and myself burst into tears as terrified as if the hand of God himself had, at that instant, torn down the veil which shut out futurity from our sight.

“And, Ulric, as faithfully as you have ever observed all promises, have you kept that fearful one.

“I send you these papers with complete confidence, and with no fear of being troublesome. You will read this letter when you feel sufficient courage to think of me—of me, who was *her* constant companion.

“Nor will this be a proof that your despair grows less. Alas ! no. On the contrary, you will seek with a savage joy among these pages, those which speak of Emma, that by their perusal, you may stir up a fresh agony in the wounds which are already bleeding so piteously.

“Perchance it will be long before you read this, or the accompanying papers—perchance you will never do so. If so, my friend, recommend these papers, as well as the casket you received two months ago, to Stok’s fidelity. I desire that all may be destroyed.

“If you peruse the manuscript I send you, you will know why I sent you the casket.

“Ulric, I shall have one subject of eternal remorse. The deposit

of that casket might have been fatal to you—I have heard all. That duel! Ah! God is my witness that I believed no one would know those papers were in your hands.

“By what fatality was that secret discovered? By what fatality was your life, and that of another person, whom I must no longer blame, exposed to peril? This is a mystery which I shall, doubtless, never fathom.

“And now, my friend, one word about myself.

“I have been very miserable for a long time, and especially for the last year. It would be blasphemy to compare my sorrows to yours, and yet my existence has been a burden heavy to be borne. When, two months ago, I settled in this retreat, where I shall, probably, end my days, the remembrance of what I had gone through, occasioned in me a kind of painful stupefaction.

“I so much needed repose, or rather forgetfulness of everything, and of the whole world, that the distant murmur of bygone days was odious to me.

“A strange reflection, then, occurred to my mind. One soothes and wears out one's sorrows, by confiding them to another. Perhaps in writing this history of my life, I shall get rid of the memories which haunt me—perhaps this silent confession will bring back repose to my pillow.

“I fancied, also, that I should experience a species of bitter joy, in retracing the past, in choosing among the withered flowers of life, some which were still precious, though faded; in casting the others to the breezes of oblivion, and finally, in giving vent at last, to those indignant feelings which my pride had hitherto invariably suppressed.

“I was not, my friend, deceived in this expectation; I have found relief in this frank and honest confession of my whole life—its noble actions—its contemptible errors—and the phantoms which startled my imagination have vanished.

“In casting a glance, free at last from prejudice, upon those days which are no more, in enumerating the tears which I have shed, and in coolly analysing their origin, I have found sorrow yield to disdain, and a gloomy, melancholy calm has replaced the emotions which once agitated me so cruelly. I have recited my good actions without pride—my errors without false humility; I have not aspersed my enemies; I have not flattered my friends; I have set forth the conduct of both towards me in its true colours. The look I have thrown back upon my existence, like a judge's, has been a just and severe one.

“In my thoughts I addressed myself to you—to our friend—to our sister.

“I remembered that in those days of happiness, often and often both she and yourself had said to me, “*Matilda, read us some of the pages of your heart.*” I remembered, too, that the frankness with which I did so, charmed and terrified you by turns.

"If, my friend, you read these pages, you will not love me more ; but, perhaps, will more esteem me.

"And now, my end is accomplished ; though there is a void in my heart, it is at least a tranquil one. The past is my security for the future. I am indebted to you for the repose which I enjoy ; for no one else should ever have received these confidences—confidences which have soothed sorrows, alas ! how poignant.

"Adieu my friend, adieu my brother, and remember Matilda, when you read in these pages those two names, which shall be always as sacredly united in my heart as they have been in this world—*Ulric—Emma*.

"MATILDA."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### MADemoisELLE DE MARAN.

LEFT an orphan in my early years, I spent my childhood with an aunt, Mademoiselle de Maran, my father's sister.

I was brought up by Madame Blondeau, an excellent woman, who, at the period of my birth, had been already for a long time in the service of my mother.

My aunt had always evinced a disinclination to matrimony ; she was deformed in her person, but a most extremely witty and satirical woman.

Notwithstanding her deformity, her ugliness, and her excessive shortness of figure, few possessed a more imposing, or rather a more haughty expression of countenance, than Mademoiselle de Maran. She did not, indeed, inspire that respectful deference which noble features and distinction, or affable condescension of manner invariably command ; but her sight occasioned in one a kind of terror and distrust of one's self.

Mademoiselle de Maran had never been separated from my father ; towards the middle of the revolution she had emigrated to England with him, after having been a partaker in all his sorrows and all his dangers.

In spite of all the misery which my aunt has brought upon me, I am bound to own that she had a tender affection for her brother ; but the very love of the wicked bears the fatal stamp of their nature ; they seem to attach themselves to one person, in order to have a pretext for hating a hundred others ; they love you, indeed, but they at the same time detest those who have a right to share your affection, or who exhibit any tokens of their own towards you.

Of this nature was my aunt's love for my father. Moreover, the pride and firmness of her disposition established a complete in-

fluence over him, and he took no step without consulting her. Her advice was always remarkable for foresight, subtilty, and tact. Detesting Napoleon as much as the revolution whence he sprung, intimately acquainted with several members of the English Cabinet, and foreseeing the fall of the empire, my aunt had persuaded my father, about the year 1812, to reside near Hartwell, and to become an assiduous courtier to Louis the Eighteenth. Mademoiselle de Maran was in the constant habit of seeing the King herself, and had got into favour by her lively and caustic disposition, her correct judgment, and the freedom of her conversation ; she was also an admirable Latin scholar, and delighted the Prince by her quotations, which were full of *à propos* and flattery, the more subtile from being concealed by the exterior of a coarseness that was almost cynical.

Acute, clever, penetrating, and dreaded for her malicious sarcasms, which feared nothing and spared none, Mademoiselle de Maran employed her very ugliness, deformity, and weakness, as a weapon, at one time offensive—at another, defensive, in defying both sexes. She yielded herself up as a victim to ridicule, in order to have the right of mercilessly immolating others at the same altar.

She possessed the art of always surprising the secrets of the incautious or the confiding, and those very secrets she afterwards made use of, with most dangerous adroitness, in establishing her power over those who had thus become the dupes of her cunning. Knowing, too, as she did, the vulnerable point of each individual, she was never sparing of the most bitter railery, and affected, at the same time, a wish that no mercy might be shown to her own foibles.

She commonly indulged in a style of conversation so familiar as almost to degenerate into vulgarity. I have heard her say that part of her youth had been spent at *Ponchartrain*, with old Madame de Maurepas (at the time M. Maurepas was banished to that seat) and that she had there acquired this habit of employing these unrefined expressions, a habit, indeed, much in fashion during the Regency, and which had continued in vogue with some of the Court set, till the end of Louis the Fifteenth's reign.

Do not, then, my friend, feel surprised if you should, in the course of my history, stumble now and then upon expressions, which, in our days, would scarcely be tolerated. My aim has been, to alter nothing which could give a true idea of Mademoiselle de Maran's physiology.

Louis the Eighteenth, who liked epigrams to be as savage, and jokes as coarse as possible, was rather partial to my aunt's style of conversation, and used to say, " With her one is more at one's ease than with a man, and under less restraint than with a woman." In the year 1812, my father, the Marquis de Maran, was about forty years of age. He had several times been desirous of marrying ; but

my aunt, dreading to lose her influence over him, had broken off all his matrimonial negociations at one time, by skilfully scandalising the young ladies' characters ; at another, by attributing to my father himself such violence and also hypocrisy of disposition, that several fathers would not hear of M. de Maran for a son-in-law.

M. de Maran chanced to see my mother, and he was so struck with her beauty, her charming disposition, and her enchanting wit, that he became passionately enamoured, and to such a degree, that he announced to my aunt, at the same time, his love, and his intention of ratifying it by a marriage.

My mother was the daughter of the Baron d'Arbois, an emigrant and formerly a Lieutenant-General in the King's service ; but her marvellous beauty was her only dowry.

Mademoiselle de Maran, who was herself avaricious and deformed, despised poverty, and abhorred beauty. She set every engine at work, prayers, threats, tears, sarcasms, and plots, in order to turn my father from his purpose. This time, however, he was inflexible, and my mother became his wife.

You may imagine, my friend, the fury of my aunt, and the hatred she conceived against my father's bride. For the first time in his life, M. de Maran had shaken off the yoke of his imperious sister, who, however, was too skilful, to betray the animosity she felt. She first of all, in my father's presence, treated my mother with cold politeness, and then, little by little, appeared inclined to become sociable, and made sundry seeming little sacrifices to her ; but as Mademoiselle de Maran continued to reside with her brother, she soon resumed all her former influence over him. My aunt's age, her satirical and haughty disposition overawed my mother, whose angelic sweetness of character was only equalled by her timidity. My father treated his young wife like a spoiled child, and all the important questions of domestic life were reserved for Mademoiselle de Maran, who, having grown tired of her self-restraint, soon compelled my mother to atone, by daily recurring annoyances, for her fatal marriage. My father, the best of men, and distinguished by every feeling of uprightness and generosity, was, nevertheless, unluckily destitute of firmness ; he doated, it is true, upon his wife ; but he looked up to his sister with a mingled attachment and respect, and considered her as the most safe and valuable counsellor that he could have.

When my father had been married a year, Mademoiselle de Maran's influence, which had been shaken for an instant, returned with double authority, and my mother made the painful discovery that she had never possessed the confidence of her husband. Nothing was done except at the instigation, or with the approval of my aunt. Two or three times, indeed, my mother attempted to exercise the authority of a mistress in her own family, and complained to her husband of Mademoiselle de Maran's encroachments ; but the most painful scenes were the consequence.

My father plainly told my mother that he would never sacrifice his brotherly affection—that tie which had commenced at the cradle, to finish only at the grave—in favour of an attachment strong as it undoubtedly was—of such recent date, and from that day forth my mother, who was deeply hurt, but too proud to complain, and too timid to contend against her sister-in-law, made up her mind to resignation, and was completely sacrificed to Mademoiselle de Maran.

The events which followed the misfortunes of 1813, and which placed my father in a position to gratify his ambitious views, increased still further the influence of Mademoiselle de Maran. Thanks to the intercourse which, by his sister's advice, he had long kept up with Louis the Eighteenth, M. de Maran was entrusted with several very delicate missions at the Courts of Vienna, and Berlin. He regularly informed his sister of the progress of his negotiations, for her capacity rendered her quite equal to taking a part in the most important political affairs, and her advice was highly useful to my father, whose diplomatic schemes were crowned with the highest success. In 1814, his services were bounteously and nobly recompensed by a very high place in the Councils of Louis the Eighteenth, whom he afterwards followed to Ghent, and accompanied on his return to France.

I was born in 1813, during my father's absence in Germany. This event, which, had my father been at home, might have, in some degree, restored my mother's influence over her husband, occasioned (as things turned out) but little change in that intercourse, which had already become marked by so much coldness between them. The increase of Mademoiselle de Maran's influence, and the unhappiness of my mother kept pace with the extension of my father's fortune ; and his drawing-room became a *rendezvous* for political characters, to whom Mademoiselle de Maran alone did the honours of the house.

My mother, a girl of eighteen, had a deep-rooted antipathy to State affairs, which had no interest for her, and she preferred music and poetry to those dry discussions of diplomacy in which she had neither the power nor the inclination to take a part.

Mademoiselle de Maran, on the contrary, was in her glory on those occasions. From my subsequent acquaintance with *political women* in society, I have become convinced that they are all alike. They are a bastard race with the ambitious and selfish passions of the other sex, and without one of the qualities and graces of their own, they are remarkable for barrenness of intellect, emptiness and frigidity of heart, harshness of disposition, and the most ridiculous pretensions to superior knowledge ; in a word, *political women* are a mongrel breed between a school-master and a step-mother, and even in married life, perpetuate the characteristics of old maids.

By degrees, under the pretence of delicate health, my mother

withdrew altogether from that society, which was so delightful to her sister-in-law. All her affection was concentrated upon me, and she loved me as the only refuge from her sorrows, as her only consolation, as her only hope. Still her heart was too good and generous a one to allow her ever to utter a complaint or reproach against Mademoiselle de Maran.

My father was now raised to the Peerage, and a final and a fatal grief was reserved for my poor mother ; she perceived that my father's affection for me diminished daily, and the few and cold caresses he bestowed upon me, were accompanied by an expression of regret, characteristic of the pride of hereditary nobility, "What a pity it is not a boy." This coldness of my father's towards me soon grew into a complete indifference.

This last blow was too much for my mother ; she lingered on a few months longer, and died.

Ah ! how many and bitter tears I have shed listening to my governess, while she described the last moments of that best of mothers, and the fears which haunted her dying bed, for me—fears, alas ! too soon verified—that I should fall into the hands of Mademoiselle de Maran.

My mother was acquainted with my father's weakness of character, and she exacted an oath from my governess that she would never leave me, and besides this she made my father promise to keep Blondeau as my attendant. "Alas !" said my mother to that faithful creature, "I foresee too well, my poor Matilda will have no one but you in this world ; oh ! never forsake her."

Her dying words to my father were severe, touching, and solemn—

"I am dying very young ; I have suffered deeply ; I have never complained, and I forgive all ; but you shall answer at God's tribunal for my child's future fate."

About a year after my mother's death, my father was thrown from his horse while on a hunting expedition with the Dauphin. The accident was fatal, and I became an orphan at four years old, and was confided to the care of my aunt as my nearest relation.

To do Mademoiselle de Maran justice, she had loved my father as much as she was capable of loving anything, and her conduct towards my mother had been dictated by a jealousy of *his* affection, a jealousy which turned at last into an actual hatred of *her*.

Mademoiselle de Maran was deeply affected at my father's death ; she shed many bitter tears, and her despair was violent, though internal. From that time, her disposition became more splenetic ; her wit more cutting, and her malice less compassionate. I bore a striking likeness to my mother, in every feature, and my aunt, forgetting that I was the child of her beloved brother, and seeing in me only the offspring of the woman she had

abhorred, was resolved that I should inherit her hatred of my mother.

\* \* \* \* \*

During my childhood, Mademoiselle de Maran was almost incessantly an object of terror to me ; her long, thin, brownish face, and her strongly marked features, were rendered still more harsh in appearance, by a string of false, black hair, which half-concealed her forehead ; her eye-brows were grey and very thick ; her eyes, dark, small, and piercing.

She wore, all the year through, a dress of *carmélite* silk, and a bonnet of the same colour and stuff which she always kept on her head, even before she was up in the morning, for she used to breakfast, write, or read in bed, wrapped up in one of those night-cloaks (also of *carmélite* silk) which were in fashion before the revolution.

Every day, when the time was come for me to visit my aunt in her room, I was seized with an involuntary trembling, and my tears almost choked me. It required all the affection of my poor Blondeau to persuade me to go to Mademoiselle de Maran ; and she had even declared that if I continued to exhibit such alarm, she should be obliged to leave me. Struck by this threat, I overcame my terrors, checked my tears, and pressing Blondeau's hand with my little fingers, I set off with her for these formidable interviews. We had first to pass through an ante-chamber, where my aunt's *maitre d'hôtel*, whose name was *Servien*, was usually in attendance. This man and Mademoiselle de Maran's wolf-dog *Felix*, were equally objects of an insurmountable antipathy on my part.

Nearly half of *Servien*'s face was disfigured by a disgusting claret stain ; his mouth was enormous, and his hands large and hairy. Altogether, he gave me the idea of a thorough bred Ogre.

When Mademoiselle de Maran's bed-room door was at length opened, I held fast by Blondeau's gown, and trembled as I approached the bed. Nor was my terror unreasonable, for *Felix*, a little white wolf-dog, with sharp ears, immediately made his appearance from under the quilt, and displayed, with a growl, two rows of formidable teeth. This animal had several times bitten me till the blood came, and my aunt had only punished him by saying, in a mildly reproving voice, while she cast an angry look at me, " Come, come, you foolish little fellow, let the brat alone ; don't you see she won't play with you ? "

Mademoiselle de Maran was a well informed woman, and thoroughly versed in the politics of the day. I usually found her in bed, in her night-gown and bonnet of *carmélite* silk, reading the newspapers, or some great folio volume, supported on a reading-desk. She invariably received me with a rebuke or a sneer.

These scenes were so often renewed, and have left so deep an impression upon my mind, that even now I can recal them in their slightest details, and I am the more particular in relating them,

because the incessant terror which haunted my childish days, has exercised a powerful influence over the remainder of my life. I have even now before me, Mademoiselle de Maran's chamber.

At the further end of the alcove, with its drapery of dark red damask, was a large ivory crucifix, set off with greater effect, by a frame of black velvet, and having its top formed by a death's head, also of ivory. This holy emblem, I believe merely to have been placed there to save appearances, as I never recollect an instance of my aunt's going to mass.

Almost all the window panes were covered with bits of painted glass ; among these I particularly recollect a decapitation of John the Baptist, which has many a time haunted my childish dreams.

On the marble slab of a red lacquer scrutoire stood in a couple of glass cases, the father and great grandfather of Felix, stuffed in a most superior style, and those two motionless phantoms, with their bright, enamel eyes, and their savage look, as if they were ready to bite even in death, caused me, perhaps, more alarm than their living descendant.

To me there seemed to be always something supernatural in the look of those animals in glass cases, which never moved, never ate, and were incessantly showing me their teeth.

Several ancient family portraits stood out from the grey wainscoting, one of which was a likeness of my great aunt, formerly abbess of the Ursulines, at Blois, a cold, stern, countenance as pale as the head-band of white cloth which enclosed her forehead and cheeks. I was less struck with the other portraits which represented several of our ancestors in the court dresses or armour of ages long gone by.

In conclusion, the chimney-piece was adorned with two hideous, fantastical, green figures of China porcelain. These monsters were kept continually moving by a hidden pendulum, which, at the same time, set their horrid red eyes rolling in a frightful manner.

Fancy, my friend, a poor child five or six years old, in the midst of all these mysterious wonders, and you will easily conceive my alarm.

But alas ! all this was merely a prelude to much worse torments. I was obliged, in spite of the barks and bites of Felix, to sit down upon my aunt's bed, and allow myself to be kissed by her.

Mademoiselle de Maran was a confirmed snuff-taker, and I never could endure its smell. And yet, in spite of the terror and aversion that I felt for my aunt, I could not help being touched at the marks of affection she was desirous of bestowing upon me, and consequently, I made incredible, but often useless efforts, to conquer my fears.

I have since learned (and Mademoiselle de Maran's conduct has been but too plain a proof of her aversion) that she forced me to undergo the infliction of this daily kiss, not from affection, but for the sake of diverting herself with my terrors.

One scene, among others, I shall never forget, and from it you will be able to form an idea of my aunt's disposition.

One day, I was taken to her, and, whether presentiment, or chance, she had never appeared to me so spiteful ; I was afraid of approaching, and hung down my head so low, that the long ringlets of my hair fell completely over my face.

At last Blondeau put me upon Mademoiselle de Maran's bed ; my aunt took me roughly by the arm, and angrily exclaimed—

" Good God ! what a fool the child looks with her great, stupid eyes, and her hair all over her face. Come, come, we must cut all this fine hair short, like a boy's."

Madame Blondeau, who has since related all these particulars to me, clasped her hands and exclaimed—

" Holy Virgin, Mademoiselle ! it would be as bad as murder to cut off Matilda's beautiful fair hair ! Why, it comes down to her very feet !

" Well," replied my aunt, " that is just the reason ; if we don't, she will tumble over it—hold your tongue, and bring me a pair of scissors."

" Ah ! Mademoiselle," again urged Blondeau, with tears in her eyes, " do not do it, I entreat you. Mademoiselle must allow me to say it would be almost an impious—a sacrilegious act."

" What do you mean ? What do you mean ?" enquired my aunt, in those shrill and imperious tones which made every one tremble near her.

" Mademoiselle," my governess replied, with a faltering voice, " I was expressly commanded by the Marchioness never to cut her daughter's hair. Poor lady ! her own hair was so beautiful ! and *that* had never been cut, and this was the reason that she gave me this injunction, upon her very death-bed."

After saying this the excellent Blondeau burst into tears.

" You are an impertinent and good for nothing liar ! My *sister-in-law* never talked such nonsense. Bring me a pair of scissors, and hold your tongue."

My aunt uttered the words, "*My sister-in-law*," with such a bitter expression of sarcasm, that I never afterwards heard her pronounce those words without a painful feeling.

Mademoiselle de Maran appeared to be so irritated, that I should not have been more terrified had my life itself been at stake. With one hand she dragged me towards her, squeezing my arm as in a vice, with her long, lean fingers, which were as hard as iron, while with the other, she pulled out my comb, letting down my hair, which soon covered my shoulders. Mute with terror, I had not even strength enough to scream.

" Mademoiselle ! Mademoiselle !" exclaimed Blondeau, falling on her knees, " for Heaven's sake do not do it ; Matilda will suffer for it hereafter ; Mademoiselle, it is an act of disobedience to her dying mother's commands."

"Will you, or will you not, give me a pair of scissors, you stupid beast?"

"Oh, my God! my God! Mademoiselle."

Without saying another word, my aunt rang the bell, which was answered by Servien.

"Servien, bring me your large pantry scissors."

"Very well, Mademoiselle," replied Servien, and he left the room.

"Mademoiselle!" energetically exclaimed my governess, "I am nothing but a poor servant, and you are the mistress in this house, but I will die before my child's hair shall be touched;" and she approached the bed, to rescue me from my aunt's grip.

Felix, irritated by this movement of Blondeau's, flew at her, and bit her in the cheek.

"Ah! the spiteful brute!" exclaimed Blondeau in a passion, and, seizing Felix by the neck, she threw him violently down on the floor.

The dog set up a most piteous yell, and I felt my aunt digging her nails into my bare shoulder.

"Get away with you! get away! you wretch," said Mademoiselle de Maran, to Blondeau; and then addressing herself to Servien, who had just come in—

"Turn that insolent woman out," she continued "and come here and hold this brat while I cut her hair off."

"Pardon! pardon! Mademoiselle. I was in the wrong; I forgot myself; but do have pity on Matilda! Spare, oh, spare those beautiful locks, on each of which, still lingers the touch of a dying mother; and shall *that* not make them sacred?"

Such was poor Blondeau's despairing invocation.

"If you say another word, you leave my service; do you hear?" was my aunt's reply.

Blondeau was stupified at this threat; she knew that Mademoiselle de Maran was fully capable of keeping her word, and as she would have submitted to anything sooner than leave me, she resigned herself to the sacrifice.

Never shall I forget that scene; it may appear trivial; but to me it was a horrible one.

Servien, with his hideously stained face, stood there with his immense scissors open, and thinking he was going to kill me, I uttered the most piercing shrieks.

"Take her in your arms," said my aunt, to Servien, and hold her tight; if she kicks about so, she will cut herself."

Alas! I could struggle no longer; for I was almost insensible.

Blondeau hid her face, and sobbed; and Servien took me with his great hands.

I shut my eyes and shuddered, when I felt the cold steel touch my neck; I heard the grinding noise of the scissors, and I felt my hair falling down all round.

When the execution was completed my aunt said to Servien with a hearty laugh—

“ Well done ; she looks like a frightful little singing boy now ; call one of the house-maids, Servien, to *sweep away* those fine locks.”

Blondeau, trembling all over, asked leave to pick up the hair and keep it ; my aunt consented, and ordered her to take me away. Just as I was leaving the room, Mademoiselle de Maran had me brought back again, she looked at me for a minute, and exclaimed, with another loud laugh—

“ My God ! what an ugly little wretch it is now ! ”

When I and Blondeau had got back to the chamber which we occupied in common, she took me in her arms, kissed me, and wept over me.

I had been so terrified at the sight of Servien's great scissors, that the close of the scene seemed to me almost a happy one. I did not share my governess's admiration and respect for my flowing locks ; indeed, I may own that I was rather pleased at being able to run about in the garden, without having to put my hair out of my eyes every minute. My aunt's last words had made most impression upon me, “ what an ugly little wretch it is now ! ” I entreated my governess to take me before a looking-glass, and I was such a singular figure, that to Blondeau's great annoyance I burst into a laugh myself. I afterwards was able to account for Mademoiselle de Maran's singular behaviour. She had always felt a profound antipathy and aversion for everything that was beautiful, and I may say, my friend, without vanity, or rather if I may believe the blind affection of my governess, that I was really a lovely child. My aunt, moreover, had always detested my mother, and alas ! I afterwards made some very painful discoveries relative to that feeling.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A PROTECTOR.

I WAS now seven years old, and my aunt's aversion appeared to increase. There was no petty torment that she did not delight in inflicting upon me. For instance, I had always dined in my governess's room ; but now my aunt insisted upon my dining at her own table ; she always placed her snuff-box open close to my plate, to my ineffable disgust ; if I had a dislike to any particular dish, it was put before me day after day, and if I was unable to repress my disgust, Mademoiselle de Maran had my plate put in Felix's kennel, and I had then, in spite of my terror, to crawl on my hands and knees, to fetch this food, and afterwards to eat it upon my knees ; my aunt observing that the presence of my good Blondeau gave me

courage to endure all these annoyances, without a tear, forbade her to wait upon me at table, and Servien, the *matre d'hôtel*, the man for whom I entertained equal terror and disgust, was made to replace her ; when I now reflect upon those days, I am at a loss to conceive how my aunt, in spite of her various occupations, and her real superiority of intellect, could employ such refined calculations and such perseverance in tormenting an unfortunate child, for nothing was left to chance ; but her behaviour to me was studied and systematic.

By degrees I became hardened in my sorrows, and my sufferings inspired me with a thirst for revenge.

I observed that the more I cried, the more merry and contented my aunt appeared ; and by dint of the greatest exertions, I succeeded in restraining myself, and in concealing my tears. My aunt's surprise and spite, when she observed this, gave me the greatest delight ; and as she increased her harsh treatment, I increased my endurance and dissimulation in a proportionate degree.

I shudder sometimes even now, when I think of this open contest between a forsaken child and such a woman as Mademoiselle de Maran—a contest in which I ended by being victor, for my aunt's spitefulness could not exceed a certain limit.

Every servant in the house trembled in her presence, and my poor governess was exposed to a thousand little annoyances every day. The poor woman's devotion to me must have been really heroic, or she could never have endured so many vexations ; my aunt had twice endeavoured to separate us ; but I became so dangerously ill in consequence, that she was obliged to give up this favourite project.

Whether through intention or negligence of my aunt, I do not know ; but at seven years of age, I had never had a master. My governess had taught me to read and write ; I said my prayers and catechism to her, and received, thanks to that good creature's almost motherly affection, such an education as a person of her class would bestow upon her daughter.

Children are never deceived in the feelings and dispositions of those who surround them ; their penetration is most embarrassing, and when they know they are loved, they are incredibly adroit in establishing their despotism. I was as gay, riotous, and tyrannical with my governess, as I was silent and timid in the presence of Mademoiselle de Maran. Blondeau never opposed my most extravagant whims, unless in a case of risk to my health ; her love for me was actual idolatry, and she was never tired of praising my beauty, wit, and pretty ways.

My childhood was spent in this manner, between the taunts and harsh treatment of my aunt, and the blind flatteries of Blondeau, and of course my disposition shared the influences of both. I was

by turns, proud or humble to the very extreme, radiant with happiness, or a prey to bitter grief, and I was capable of hatred and love to a degree incredible at my age. The very brutality of my aunt was not displeasing to me, because it afforded me the means of defying and enraging her by my composure. Mademoiselle de Maran revenged herself by persuading me, with infinite artfulness, that I was ugly and stupid. On such occasions I repressed my tears till I had hurried to my governess, when I burst into sobs, and then, to console me, the poor woman praised me most outrageously, and I ended by believing her extravagant commendations.

Hence, doubtless, arose the extreme force of feeling, and inability to steer that *middle course* so frequently essential in this life, for which I was afterwards so remarkable.

Nor has age modified in me this strange mode of self judgment. Instead of choosing a rational medium between two exaggerations—instead of thinking myself neither altogether inferior, nor altogether superior to the rest of the world, I have passed my existence in a continual alternative of the most insolent confidence, or the most humiliating distrust in myself. The triumphs I had achieved, and the humiliations I had endured, were alike powerless in preventing, on the one hand a ridiculous self-abasement—on the other, a disdainful haughtiness. Even in the most ordinary intercourse of life, the first word, the first look made me the slave, or the tyrant. There are people in whose presence the boldest trembled, so feared were they, and so deserving of that fear, and those I have always completely overawed, while others, most contemptible in every respect, have ruled me with most despotic influence. Another indelible relic of my early education, has been the habit and inclination of dissembling my sorrows or my sufferings, and of revenging the evil done me, by wearing a mask of contemptuous indifference.

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I was not, I believe, quite seven years old when my education was completely changed. The events which occasioned this domestic revolution are still present to my memory. I had been wholly given up to my aunt's care, by the advice of my guardian, Baron D'Orbeval, a rather distant relation of my mother's, and whom I rarely saw.

When he visited Mademoiselle de Maran, I was sent for ; the shabby frock, which my aunt always insisted upon my wearing, was taken off ; rather more attention than usual was paid to my toilet, and I was brought into my Guardian's presence.

The Baron was a tall, pale, weasel-faced old man ; he wore a carefully curled flaxen wig, a green silk shade, and a wadded coat, of puce-coloured silk, very much the worse for wear ; he was a Counsellor at the Cour de Cassation, and a great miser. When I was brought up to him, he used to look at me with severity, and to ask me if I had been a good girl ? This question, my aunt

usually was kind enough to answer, by saying I was obstinate, stupid and idle. My guardian would then give me a smart tap on the cheek, and say—"This is very naughty, young lady, very naughty, indeed. If you go on in this way, we must send you to a charity school."

I then used to burst into tears, and was carried off by Blondeau.

I had not had a visit from my guardian for three or four months, when one day a gentleman, still young, and a stranger to me, entered my room, on seeing whom, Blondeau exclaimed, clasping her hands, and with an expression of surprise and joy—

"Good God ! it is you—it is you, Monsieur de Mortagne !"

The gentleman, without answering my governess, took me in his arms, gazed at me in silence, with a kind of eager curiosity, and after having tenderly embraced me, put me down again, saying, while he brushed away a tear—"What a likeness ! what a likeness !" He then fell into a fit of musing.

I thought the stranger's countenance such a kind one, in spite of the severity of his features, he had betrayed such evident emotion while gazing at me, and his presence appeared to delight Blondeau so much, that I drew close up to him without any fear. He was a first cousin of my mother's, had been travelling for several years, and had only just returned to France.

The Count de Mortagne was looked upon as a very strange man ; he had served with very great distinction under the empire ; but since then he had led an incessantly wandering life, which the world could not understand.

He had travelled through the Old World and the New, and was said to be a man of prodigious knowledge, iron resoluteness, and unflinching courage ; his frankness, however, which was almost brutal, had permitted him to make but few friends.

His affection for my mother had been that of the most attached brother. Several times he had endeavoured to make my father appreciate all the value of the treasure he was neglecting, while he followed the ambitious advice of his sister ; hence my aunt entertained a deep-rooted aversion to Monsieur de Mortagne ; but being a member of my family junto, and as such, being entrusted with the protection of my interests, he was sometimes, of necessity, brought into contact with Mademoiselle de Maran.

He had been absent in India for four years, and his first visit, on arriving at Paris, was to me.

He could not look at me, admire me, and praise me enough, and overwhelmed Blondeau with questions.

"Was I happy ? Was I educated in a manner befitting my station ? What masters had I ? I ought to know a great deal at seven years old ; I looked so intelligent, he was sure I must have profited greatly by their instructions ?"

My poor governess was almost afraid to reply ; at last she confessed the truth with tears. "The little I knew, she

had taught me ; Mademoiselle de Maran grew more harsh and unjust towards me every day ; I was allowed none of the pleasures natural to my age, and—what exasperated Blondeau more than anything—I was never dressed in a manner befitting the daughter of the Marchioness de Maran.”

Monsieur de Mortagne’s indignation increased at every word my governess uttered.

He was a man of lofty stature and always carelessly dressed. Although scarcely forty years old, he was already bald, and he wore a long beard, an uncommon thing in those days, though now so fashionable an appendage. The roughness of his manners, the soldier-like boldness of his language, and his wild and singular expression of countenance, had acquired for him, in society, the nickname of “*The Danube Boor*.”

His politics were those of the greatest radicals of the period, and he never concealed his opinions, though well meaning persons had often advised him to use more moderation in their display.

He could hide, when he chose, the most bitter irony, beneath an appearance of artless good-nature ; but his language was, in general, rough, harsh, and almost brutal.

When my governess had acquainted Monsieur de Mortagne with the manner in which I had been brought up by my aunt, my cousin’s face, which was sunburnt by an Indian climate, turned purple with passion ; after a few hurried steps to and fro, he took me suddenly in his arms, and proceeded towards Mademoiselle de Maran’s room, exclaiming—

“ Ah ! this is the way, then, she treats my poor cousin’s child ! I will say a word or two to her myself, and in a pretty loud voice, too ! ”

“ For Heaven’s sake, *Monsieur le Comte*, be careful,” said my governess, following him with a look of terror.

“ Make yourself easy, Madame Blondeau,” was his reply ; “ it takes more than this to frighten me ! I have crushed reptiles under my feet that were more venomous than Mademoiselle de Maran.”

He then kissed me twice, and said—“ Poor child, your lot shall soon be changed.”

Never shall I forget the joy I felt when I guessed my protector was about to avenge me for all my aunt’s spiteful tricks. In my delight and gratitude, I threw my arms around Monsieur de Mortagne’s neck, and fancying I was conferring an important service, I whispered—

“ My aunt’s dog Felix, sir, is as spiteful as herself, and you must take great care, or he will bite you till the blood comes.”

“ If he bites me, my little Matilda, I will throw him out of the window,” was Monsieur de Montagne’s reply, and he kissed me again.

I began to look upon Monsieur de Mortagne as a hero, and for the first time, I felt the burning pleasure of revenge.





Forcible entry into Mademoiselle de Miran's bed room

Servien was, as usual in the waiting-room, which served as an ante-chamber to his mistress's bed-room. Monsieur de Mortagne, followed by Blondeau, was about to open the door, when the *maître d'hôtel* got up and said—

"I do not know, sir, whether you can see Mademoiselle."

Monsieur de Mortagne, without answering, pushed him back with his elbow, and entered my aunt's room, who, as usual, was sitting up in bed in her night-gown and bonnet of *carmélite* silk, reading the newspaper.

Monsieur de Mortagne had entered so abruptly and noisily, that he alarmed Felix, who flew out from his kennel, and commenced a resolute attack upon my protector's legs.

"Take care—take care," I whispered; "here comes the spiteful dog."

"Here's something for him," replied my avenger, and with a vigorous kick, he sent Felix sprawling under the bed.

My aunt, already greatly irritated at the entrance of Monsieur de Mortagne, whom she detested, was still more incensed at the yells of her favourite, and she angrily exclaimed—

"This conduct, sir, is unheard of! How dare you take my chamber by storm in this way, and half kill my dog? Do you take my house for a barracks?"

Monsieur de Mortagne has often since described this scene to me.

He coolly sat down by the side of Mademoiselle de Maran's bed, holding me up on his knees, and replied—

"This is not a question, Madame, of dogs, or taking by storm; but of your cruelty towards this unfortunate child, to whom you have acted a step-mother's part."

"What's all this?—what's all this?" haughtily answered my aunt. "Have you come back all the way from the antipodes, sir, to show off your impertinence to me! It is no reason because you look like a Hottentot, and enjoy a well deserved reputation for clownishness, that I should suffer myself to be insulted and brow-beaten in my own house—do you hear, sir?"

"Nor," replied Monsieur de Mortagne, who always returned my aunt's abuse with interest, "is it any reason because you have the good luck to unite in yourself the ugliness and wickedness of the late Duke de Gesvres, with the deformity and wit of an *Æsop*, that I should put up with your insolence—do you hear, Madame?"

My aunt grew pale with passion, and exclaimed—

"Have a care, sir; when I hate, I hate well, and when I hate, I manage to let it be felt."

"I know you have powerful friends and dangerous tools at your service; but I have need of none, and fear none; from me you shall have the truth, and if it hurts you, so much the worse for you. I have spoken it before to many others who survived it—the more's

the pity ; in a word, this child has been disgracefully brought up, and her education has been so neglected, that I blush on your account. Do you feel no shame at treating your own brother's daughter in such a manner ?”

These words stirred up at once, my aunt's affection for my father, and her hatred of my mother. She exclaimed—

“ And it is precisely because my brother's memory is sacred to me, that I treat that little brat in the way that I choose to treat her. She has been placed under my care ; I am only responsible to her guardian for my conduct, so, sir, you may carry your insolence somewhere else, for what goes on here is no business of yours.”

“ It is so far my business that, as a member of the family council, I shall, this very day, call an assembly of the relations, and we shall then find out whether your niece has hitherto received that education to which she is entitled.”

This threat appeared to take a good deal of effect upon *Made-moiselle de Maran*.

“ Come here, child, and answer for yourself,” said my aunt, making me a sign to come to her.

Instead of obeying, I nestled still closer to *Monsieur de Mortagne*, and looked up to him with an imploring air.

“ You see very well,” said *Monsieur de Mortagne*, “ that you frighten her out of her life, with your pretended kindnesses. It is for you, and not this child, to answer. She has not one single master ; she scarcely knows what the children of the lower classes are proficient in at her age ; you deny her the clothes that are suitable to her station ; and yet, Heaven knows, you are paid enough to take care of her.”

“ What do you mean ? *Me* paid, indeed !” indignantly exclaimed my aunt.

“ I mean that you are allowed a thousand francs a month out of this poor child's fortune, for her expenses, and it is easy to perceive, from the way in which she is clothed and instructed, that you do not spend a hundred *louis* a year upon her. What do you do with the rest ? If you have pocketted it, you may rest assured that I will make you account for it. It is no reason because you are thoroughly wicked, that you should be a thorough miser as well.”

“ Well, this is beyond all endurance ! If one did not know, sir, you were half mad, one should be inclined to have you thrown out of the window ! What accounts have I to render you, indeed ? What do you mean by these impertinent holy-inquisition sort of airs ?” exclaimed *Mademoiselle de Maran*, moving violently in her bed.

“ I tell you, I am her relation—her counsellor—do you hear what I say ?” replied *Monsieur de Mortagne*, in a voice of thunder, “ and in that capacity, I will summon you before a meeting of the family to answer for your conduct. If I do not obtain justice at their

hands against you, I will take it into my own, and we will look at one another full in the face, which will be by no means an agreeable occupation for me. You are a complete monster."

"Ah! the abominable man! his brutality will make me quite ill. What a way to treat a defenceless woman!" said my aunt in a dolorous voice.

"Pooh! pooh! madame, you have long made one forget the compassion which old age, ugliness, and infirmities should claim, by your own audacious attacks and malicious slanders. Come, come, you are no longer a woman."

"No longer a woman, indeed! What am I, then? A unicorn, perhaps. You are really too mad, sir, to be at large! Get out of my house—get out of my house! I do not wish to make any disturbance before my servants, otherwise—"

"Otherwise, madame, it would be just the same; you would only have the advantage of some witnesses. Listen to my last words—I shall call upon every member of the family council, in order to persuade them (and I shall succeed) to take this unhappy child out of your hands, and place her in a school, or a convent."

"And," ironically replied Mademoiselle de Maran, "to put the finish to this fine exploit, you, sir, will, doubtless, be employed to select the convent. It is a great pity there is no establishment of female *Jacobins*; you would put her there directly; would you not? In remembrance of the '*brothers and friends*' of 93, whose history you are so partial to, you would call her *Mamselle Scipionne*, or *Mamselle Egalité*; *Mamselle*, did I say? No, no; I meant *citoyenne*. Unfortunately those good times are past; and now-a-days, sir, once for all, there is no indulgence for people who presume to set up their own opinions against those of other *well intentioned persons*."

Mademoiselle de Maran laid such a stress upon these last words, that Monsieur de Mortagne understood their drift.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "here we are, then, at last; I was much surprised that you had not already called me *Jacobin*, or *Bonapartist*, two names, however, which do not harmonise particularly well. I know that you are treacherous enough to make my accusation a party question, in the family assembly; I know that your relations, the *ultras*, are numerous there; I know, also, that they blindly follow your counsels, and it is probable that, in this circumstance, they will make as criminal a usage of their majority, as they do in every other."

And embracing me with a tender emotion, Monsieur de Mortagne added sadly—

"Poor child! Poor France!"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed my aunt, bursting out into one of her bitter and insolent laughs; "God bless my soul! what a superb and touching speech—what a happy union of subjects—'Poor child! Poor France!' The tender-hearted Saint, Just, I

believe, used to employ those pretty pastoral expressions, at the Club of the *Cordeliers*, which, however, did not prevent him from cutting your head off the next morning. Yes—yes, sir, I can see by your fury, that if it depended upon you, you would treat me like those poor ‘*friends and brothers*.’ For really, in spite of your birth, you were deserving of a place in their ranks ; you were one of the gentlemen of the *Loire*.”

Monsieur de Mortagne has told me that, effectively, the cold and bitter sarcasms uttered by my aunt, put him beside himself ; and he regretted the brutal answer he made her.

“It is a fact, when I think that you made my poor cousin de Maran die of a broken heart—when I think that you torture an unhappy child with diabolical malice, I ask myself why a thing so morally and physically unnatural as yourself, should not be put beyond the pale of society’s laws, as it already is beyond those of nature.”

“Enough of your insults ! Get out, sir, get out !” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran with such an explosion of fury, that when Monsieur de Mortagne wanted to put me on the ground as he got up, I clung to him with all my strength and entreated him not to leave me with my aunt. He placed me in my governess’s arms, who had been a silent and unnoticed spectator of this scene, and we all three went out, leaving Mademoiselle de Maran in a state of rage difficult to describe.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A FAMILY COUNCIL.

I HAD not understood much of my aunt’s and Monsieur de Mortagne’s conversation ; I was only rejoiced to hear my protector speak in such a firm manner to Mademoiselle de Maran. I now anticipated some happy change in my situation. To most children the idea of entering a convent or a school, would have been alarming ; to me, on the contrary, it was a very agreeable one, as the sole wish of my heart was to leave my aunt’s house. The council would have to decide whether I should remain or not, in the power of Mademoiselle de Maran, and I prayed most earnestly that Monsieur de Mortagne might succeed in his intentions. The fatal day at last arrived, my aunt had me carefully dressed, and I was taken down into the drawing-room, where the members of our family were assembled.

I looked round for M. de Mortagne ; but he was not yet arrived ; my aunt placed me between herself and my guardian, M. d’Orbeval.

All our relations appeared to dread Mademoiselle de Maran, and paid her the most obsequious respect. She was known to possess

great influence, and her drawing-room was the resort of the most powerful members of the Government ; the Princes, also, showed her great favour, out of respect for Louis the Eighteenth.

M. de Talleyrand used often to divide his evenings between my aunt and the Princess de Vaudemont. That great statesman, who, as my aunt said, with great reason " had raised silence to the rank of eloquence ; talent to that of genius, and experience to that of divination," conversed, sometimes for an hour together, *tête-à-tête* with Mademoiselle de Maran, who was one of those women to whom the highest names are almost compelled to pay tribute. Children are swayed by appearances more than anything ; they cannot account for the power of genius and intrigue, and for a long time, therefore, I found it impossible to understand how Mademoiselle de Maran, with her insignificant and almost grotesque figure, could exercise so much influence over persons who were not of necessity dependant upon her. My aunt's head, when she was sitting down, being nearly on a level with her left shoulder, which was much higher than the right one, did not rise above the back of a common arm-chair, and her feet, invariably covered by black beaver shoes, rested upon a very high cushion, of which, Felix had his share. And yet, notwithstanding her ugliness and spiteful disposition, Mademoiselle de Maran's rooms were nightly filled with the very *élite* of Paris society, and she would haughtily rebuke those persons who let a day or two pass without coming to see her. On these occasions the bitterness and harshness of her reproaches pretty clearly proved that her pride, and not her affection, was interested in the homage paid her.

All had now arrived, but M. de Mortagne, who soon afterwards made his appearance ; my heart beat when I saw him, for on him depended my future fate.

I was not slow in observing that M. de Mortagne was coldly received by my relations. Although his originality was well known, there was a good deal of whispering and smiling at his beard and careless exterior ; my aunt's aversion for him, too, was notorious, and consequently, to laugh at him was a delicate way of flattering her.

After a few minutes' silence, my guardian, M. d'Orbeval, requested M. de Mortagne to mention the reasons he had deemed sufficient to call for a family assemblage. M. de Mortagne repeated what he had told my aunt, and in the same unmeasured terms, and ended by demanding that I should be placed in the convent *des Anglaises*, which was at that time in as great vogue as the *Sacré-Cœur* was at a later period.

Mademoiselle de Maran betray no emotion during this violent accusation. Our relations, who were completely under her influence, were dreadfully afraid of her ; they several times, by murmurs and interruptions, testified their indignation against M. de Mortagne, and turning their looks towards my aunt, they ap-

peared to take her as a witness that they protested against the brutality of my protector's language.

He, however, thoroughly indifferent to all their mutterings, merely shrugged his shoulders now and then, waited till the noise had ceased, and then began again, in language as strong as ever.

He must have, indeed, been a brave man, to attack Mademoiselle de Maran in such a manner ; for, situated as she was, and with such powerful protectors, she possessed a thousand means of injuring him, and avenging herself. Alas ! she proved but too well to M. de Mortagne, that the hatred she bore him was implacable. I was then a mere child ; but still I can recollect a circumstance which, in spite of its insignificance, struck me at the time, and the importance of which, I can fully appreciate now.

During this debate, my aunt's countenance had exhibited no emotion ; she held in her hands a long knitting needle, and as M. de Mortagne proceeded with his speech, Mademoiselle de Maran seemed to squeeze this needle tighter and tighter with her skinny fingers. At last, at the instant when he exclaimed, that if nothing was more respectable than ugliness, old age, and infirmities, nothing, at the same time, was more cowardly, than to abuse these three lamentable prerogatives, in insulting, with impunity, those who called one to account for one's disgraceful and cruel conduct, Mademoiselle de Maran, as if by accident, broke the needle into pieces, and I shall never forget the deadly glance which she cast on M. de Mortagne at that instant.

My guardian took it upon himself, in the name of the majority, to reply to my aunt's antagonist, and he severely blamed my protector's language, who seemed to care very little for this reproof. M. d'Orbeval next, with a most respectful manner, and merely as a matter of form, enquired of Mademoiselle de Maran if she thought it necessary to make any alterations in my education, hastening, however, to add that the assembled relations trusted implicitly, beforehand, to her decision on a subject which she was more capable of appreciating than any one.

Mademoiselle de Maran, without alluding to M. de Mortagne's attacks, replied in a most artful and adroit manner. I was effectively, she said, not what people call much advanced, my head was weak, my understanding imperfectly developed, and under these circumstances she had not thought it right to weary my intellect to no good purpose, by overwhelming me with lessons which I was not in a condition to profit by, and which would, of necessity, have given me a distaste to learning ; on the contrary, she had made my health her first object, and that, thank God, was excellent, so that I was now in a perfect condition to regain the time I had lost, without having to bear the fatigue of too intense study. She concluded by saying, that before the family assemblage had been convoked it was her intention to make me commence my studies without delay.

M. de Mortagne has often told me that it was impossible to make a more adroit defence than my aunt's, or to give a more specious colouring to her treatment of me. She proved to demonstration that by economising a good deal during the first years of my education, she had wished to lay by the means of giving me hereafter a much more extensive and complete one, and she added that it was natural I should be dull in the house of an old and infirm aunt, but that she could not believe my relations wished me to enter a convent, when she had promised my father that she would never forsake me.

In order, however, to make matters smooth, and that I might have a companion of my own age, my aunt announced that at her request my guardian had consented to withdraw his own daughter from her convent and to place her under my aunt's care. M. d'Orbeval was a widower, and thus his daughter would share my studies, and take up her abode at Mademoiselle de Maran's.

M. de Mortagne replied with his usual blunt frankness, that in that case, I should pay the expenses of Mademoiselle d'Orbeval's education, who was by no means rich, and he asserted that her father had only consented to this arrangement from motives of interest, coupled with fear of my aunt, who had it in her power to injure him or to do him service.

M. de Mortagne continued, that under any other circumstances he should have made no objection to the private education which I was intended to receive in common with my young relation, but that he had strong reasons to believe Mademoiselle de Maran's influence would be pernicious to me, and that after having tormented my childhood, she would, perhaps, ruin my youth.

He was interrupted by indignant murmurs. My guardian exclaimed that his daughter should never set foot in my aunt's house ; that he had only agreed to the proposals which had been made to him for my interest, but that he now withdrew his promise, since so vile an interpretation was put upon his kindness. However, the whole assembly having united with Mademoiselle de Maran in appeasing Baron d'Orbeval, and in blaming M. de Mortagne, my guardian promised to allow his daughter to come. This exasperated M. de Mortagne to such a degree, that he forgot himself so far as to declare there was not a man of courage in the assembly ; but that they all trembled at Mademoiselle de Maran's power. As my protector offered to maintain this declaration at the sword's point, there was but one clamour of indignation against this bully, who wanted to make brute force predominate in a family consultation, and who showed no respect to sex or old age.

M. de Mortagne, in the highest degree incensed, came up to me, and kissed me tenderly, saying, "My poor child, we shall soon meet again ; may God protect you from that vile woman, and her sycophants, I can see they have at present numbers and the law on

their side ; but patience—patience—I will find a way to save you, in spite of them.” He kissed me again and departed.

When he was gone, the general indignation increased, and soon gave way to a feeling of contemptuous pity. Those of my relations who were in a position to take up M. de Mortagne's challenge, and who had not done so, from fear of my aunt, and not from want of courage, asserted that M. de Mortagne was not right in the head, and that it was impossible to call him to a serious account for his follies.

Although much grieved at my protector's defeat, my thoughts turned almost with joy to my promised companion. I looked at her father, M. d'Orbeval, with less uneasiness, and even mustered up courage enough to ask my aunt when my cousin would arrive.

To my great surprise, Mademoiselle de Maran replied, without ill nature, and almost affectionately, that Mademoiselle Ursula d'Orbeval would come very shortly.

This intelligence filled me with joy ; had my life been a happier one, I might, perhaps, have regarded my cousin's arrival with a feeling of jealousy ; but situated as I was, I could not but believe that it would operate a favourable diversion in my position.

From that day, Mademoiselle de Maran completely changed her behaviour to me. I had now the first masters in Paris ; but, from a motive, which I afterwards discovered, my aunt still suffered Madame Blondeau to retain the place of governess to me, although that good woman was far from possessing the knowledge necessary to fill that office, now that my education was so much more cultivated. I now, however, had my own lady's maid, and instead of my former shabby clothes, my aunt insisted upon my dressing with a splendour and elegance unsuited to my age. I remember my surprise and delight at finding one day in my room, a full-length *psyché* and a toilet table *à la Duchesse*, bordered all round, with a profusion of ribbands and lace. Instead of perpetual scoldings and exclamations at my ugliness and stupidity, my aunt suddenly began to overwhelm me with the most exaggerated praises of my beauty, my figure, the elegance of my deportment, my wit and talents.

As I was naturally much astonished at this sudden change of manners, Mademoiselle de Maran told me confidentially that had I been made acquainted with these delightful facts while I was an idle little girl, my self love would have been dangerously excited ; but now that I was so assiduous at my studies, I was informed, by way of reward, that there was not in the whole world anything more charming than myself.

The lady's maid whom my aunt had provided for me was constantly repeating the same compliments ; in short, throughout the establishment, every one—not excepting even Servien—rivalled one another in flattering me.

My poor Blondeau, with that instinct and sagacity of the heart

which a true affection always bestows, was alarmed at this sudden change in my aunt's conduct, and it was her turn then to scold me, and to reprove me for paying too much attention to my dress, and too little to my prayers, and for the pride and capriciousness which I displayed.

In spite of my attachment for this excellent woman, her remonstrances displeased me, and were more painful, from their contrast with the idolatrous affection she had before professed towards me. I felt that my attachment towards her was cooling, and on the other hand, my confidence increased in Mademoiselle Julie, my lady's maid, who never omitted an opportunity of irritating me against my governess.

In spite of Mademoiselle de Maran's obliging conduct towards me, I was still unable to surmount the terror and aversion with which she had inspired me, though I used every endeavour to do so thinking that in common gratitude I was bound to show her some affection.

In the mean time, while my education rapidly advanced, and I studied drawing, music, as well as the English and Italian languages, with the utmost assiduity, that I might not find myself too inferior to my cousin Ursula d'Orbeval, whose arrival my aunt was incessantly putting off.

Mademoiselle de Maran very seldom went out ; but she sent me almost every day to take a drive in her carriage, in the *bois de Boulogne*, accompanied by Mademoiselle Julie, for whom I made no secret of my preference, and who, during the whole drive, never ceased repeating that I was admired by every body.

In short, no one would have recognised me a year after my aunt had paid such particular attention to my education. I had gained a good deal of instruction, and my intelligence had developed itself, but the seed of evil passions was at work in my heart. Notwithstanding the ivory crucifix which adorned my aunt's alcove, she never, to all appearance, attended any religious rites, but contented herself with sending me to attend mass at the church of *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, with one of her female servants.

I was always followed by a footman, who carried an emblazoned cushion for my feet, and a velvet bag, in which was my prayer-book, an ostentation as ridiculous as unbecoming in a child of my age ; and I often heard it observed as I passed along, " Mademoiselle de Maran carries her blind fondness for that niece of hers to the verge of madness."

I began to believe in this affection ; and, indeed, it was everywhere said, that my aunt idolised me, and that if I turned out badly, it would be all owing to her blindness and weak indulgence. Even now, there are many people convinced that Mademoiselle de Maran was always tenderly—too tenderly attached to me.

Nothing is more loving ; but, at the same time, nothing more cruelly selfish than children. I took a barbarous pleasure in loading

my new female attendant with marks of confidence, in the presence of Blondeau, in order, as little girls say, *to set the latter's bristles up*, and the unhappy woman, enlightened by her own good sense, and not irritated by a mean envy, suffered horribly at seeing herself so forgotten and misjudged by me, whom she loved so sincerely.

My ingratitude soon exceeded all limits.

As my understanding gradually developed itself, Mademoiselle de Maran inspired me, if not with greater affection, at least with a greater curiosity. I began to comprehend and to be amused with her sarcasms, and she often made me laugh, by ridiculing Blondeau's puritanism and remonstrances on my dawning coquetry. She would then satirize the poor woman's ignorance and her language, and I laughed still more.

By degrees, a feeling of contempt began to mingle with my forgetfulness of Blondeau's holy and devoted affection, for my aunt made me blush at the familiarity in which I lived with a woman of that description.

Doubtless, I was wrong—grievously wrong ; but I was scarcely eight years old, and the plaything of a woman who prostituted her great superiority of intellect towards the unholy purpose of throwing me into an evil course.

I followed her advice too blindly, and grew so cold towards my governess, that the poor woman, after having ineffectually tried everything to re-awaken my former affection, actually had a fit of illness brought on by grief.

When I perceived how pale and changed she had become, I saw the whole extent of my error ; my tears flowed abundantly, and I refused to leave her ; my aunt, however, beholding my affection, persuaded me that Blondeau's illness was only a pretended one.

This odious insinuation offered an excuse for my ingratitude, and I willingly believed it.

I shall never forget the look of painful surprise which my governess gave me when she saw me come back to her smiling cheerful, and jesting. She raised her emaciated hands towards the sky, and exclaimed with a burst of tears—

“ My God ! she once had a heart like her mother's ! They have ruined her—ruined her.”

From that day, the unhappy woman became more gloomy and taciturn ; she insisted upon getting up, weak as she was, and from her continual fits of absence, appeared to be under the dominion of some fixed idea.

The servants of the house made sport of her, and she who was formerly of so impatient a disposition, appeared now to suffer every thing with resignation, or rather with indifference. She scarcely ever spoke to me.

I remember one night when I awoke, I found her leaning over my pillow, her eyes bathed in tears, and gazing on me with a look of indescribable anguish. I was frightened, and pretended to go to

sleep again, and the next day I told my aunt, who said it was a joke of Blondeau's, and done for the purpose of frightening me ; I believed Mademoiselle de Maran, and nourished a feeling of resentment against my governess.

New Year's Day had now come round, and the evening before, my aunt, in discussing a new year's gift for Blondeau, observed—"You had better give her some money, instead of a dress or a piece of jewellery. *Those sort of people like money better than anything ;*" and she gave me five *louis* for Blondeau.

In former years my aunt had never given me anything for my governess, and as I then loved Blondeau tenderly, and was desirous of giving her something, I employed every year, prodigious adroitness, and dissimulation, in order to surprise her with a few lines of simple affection, or some little piece of my best embroidered work. I cannot describe Madame Blondeau's delight and rapture, when, on New Year's Eve, after my evening prayer, I threw my arms around her neck, and gave her my little present.

Now that I reflect upon it, it seems to me that there was something touching and religious in that mark of affection from me, a poor orphan, forsaken and repulsed, who, possessing nothing, had recourse to my own childish labours to pay the debt of my love. my governess, notwithstanding the inferiority of her station, had too sensitive a heart not to be touched even to tears by this proof of my affection, which sprang from my own impulse, and had not been suggested by any third person.

You may conceive, then, her painful feelings, when, on this New Year's Eve, I slipped my five *louis* into her hand gaily and laughingly. She expected one of the surprises of former years, and as I was now beginning to draw tolerably, she had even ventured to hope for some specimen of my new talent. Notwithstanding my apparent ingratitude, she had not admitted for an instant the possibility of my having forgotten those tender traditions of my childhood, and returning me the gold with a look that had in it as much sadness as uneasiness, she said—

"You have made a mistake, Matilda ; this is for *Julie* ; you have got something else for me ; have you not ?"

Her voice faltered, and she gave me an uneasy and alarmed look.

"No," I replied, "I have nothing else to give you."

"And yet, in past years—(and she attempted to hide the tears that would have way)—in past years—you know—in the evening—after your prayer—you used to give me—"

"Oh ! yes," was my reply, "I know what you mean ; but now, you see, I have no time, and I am obliged to attend to my studies ; and besides, your sort of people *like money better than anything.*"

And then, without embracing her, or shewing her the least mark of affection, I tripped out of the room, to go and admire a mag-

nificent ermine tippet, a present of Mademoiselle de Maran's to me.

As I left my governess, I heard a deep sigh and the noise made by the pieces of gold, falling from her hand, on the floor ; but so pitiless was my indifference, and so great my haste to inspect my aunt's present, that I did not stop for a moment, or even turn back my head.

Alas ! my friend, though still young, I have suffered much, and shed many bitter tears ; but God knows that in my most violent fits of despair I have often exclaimed, " I ought to bear all without complaining—I, who caused that best of women the most painful pang which the human heart can experience."

That evening, notwithstanding my indifference, I felt rather ashamed when I thought of Blondeau, and expected she would reproach me ; but, on the contrary, I found my governess more affectionate than usual, she was only extremely pale, and evidently under the influence of some strong feeling. I fancied I could perceive something extraordinary in her look.

She put me to bed, and kissed me earnestly several times, while I felt her tears falling upon my cheeks. My natural disposition once more obtained the ascendancy, and I flung myself round her neck, entreating her forgiveness for the pain I had occasioned her.

" Accuse you—you—my child !—never !" she exclaimed with tears, and kissing my hair and hands. " Never, poor child ! As long as they suffered you to be good and affectionate, you were in all things the picture of your mother. But do not let us talk any more about that, my darling child. Come, say your evening prayer, and pray, too, for your old nurse. She loves you dearly, and she has need of your prayers. The prayers of children are like those of the blessed angels, God hears and grants them."

When I had prayed, she kissed me tenderly on the forehead, and said, " Now, my child, good night—good night"

I observed that she trembled, and that her hands were burning hot, although she was excessively pale.

I fell asleep, and do not know how long I had been in a profound slumber, when I was suddenly awakened by the weight of something leaning upon me. In my fright, I half opened my eyes. I do not know what time of night it was. The remains of a fire were smouldering in the grate, and gave a trembling and flickering light to the chamber.

By the light of a night-lamp, I beheld my governess ; she was close to my bed, and I had been awakened by her attempting to embrace me.

Not daring to stir, I followed her with my eyes ; her countenance, usually so mild and calm, had then a sinister expression, which chilled me with terror.

She was looking at me, and muttering to herself with a bewildered air—

"No no ; I can endure this no longer. That monster is destroying my child ; she has rendered her indifferent and contemptuous to me. Matilda no longer loves me. I am no longer of any use to her, and I need not remain here. Indeed I could not. No ; I have endured too much to-day ; they have filled the cup to overflowing. Money to me ! Oh ! I shall go mad ; I think I am mad already. Come, no more of this ; one last kiss for this poor little slumbering angel. God will forgive me, for that cherub has prayed for me."

Saying these words, Blondeau kissed me on the forehead, and added, sobbing—

"Farewell ! farewell ! poor child ; you shall never know the misery you have brought upon me. I do not blame you ; oh, no ! it is that monster, who broke your mother's heart, and who is now trying to destroy your soul. Farewell ! Once more, farewell ! Oh ! I must kiss, once more, that beautiful fair hair I have loved so much."

And I felt her icy, cold lips upon my brow. I had till then shut my eyes, although I was quite awake. Suddenly I opened them, and saw my governess rush towards the window and open it with violence. I guessed her fatal intention, ran to her, and stopped her at the very instant she was about to throw herself headlong out.

The poor woman was at first stupified ; but recalled to herself by my screams, she fell on her knees, exclaiming—

"Oh ! my God, what was I about to do ? Pardon, pardon, I was mad ; I had forgotten my oath to the dying mother, never to forsake her child ; but I suffered so much—and especially to-day—God, in His goodness, sent this angel to prevent my crime. No, no ; I will remain with thee, my child—I will suffer—I will endure all—I will die, if necessary, of a broken heart ; but I will die near thee, and with my eyes fixed on thee. I promised it to that poor lady who, in yon heaven, hears me now."

This scene left so deep an impression on my mind, and I was so struck with Blondéau's despair, that my ingratitude was, for ever, nipped in the bud, and all my old affection for her returned, to Mademoiselle de Maran's great annoyance, who had for an instant hoped to deprive me of that honest and devoted attachment.

A short time afterwards my aunt informed me that Ursula d'Orbeval, my guardian's daughter, and a cousin of mine, was at last coming to live with us, and added, that as I was much prettier, much better educated, and much better dressed than my cousin, I should find a great pleasure in making the new visiter fully conscious of my superiority.

Thus Mademoiselle de Maran left me not one single feeling in its natural purity and bloom. Already the joy—candid and gentle as it was—that I felt in the idea of finding a friend of my own

age, was debased by the after thought of awakening jealousy, envy, and consequently, hatred, in that very friend's bosom.

I know not, my friend, if you remark that my aunt, with singular sagacity, had, I might say, divided my youth into two parts. Till I was nine years old, I had endured terror, privations, and neglect ; I was not yet ripe for her ulterior objects.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### A CHILDISH FRIENDSHIP.

A new era was about to dawn in my life. Till then, the nature of my feelings had been incomplete. I feared my aunt ; but her wit amused me, and in spite of some marks of coldness and neglect, I was tenderly attached to my governess, though there existed between us no similarity of age or disposition.

When Ursula d'Orbeval arrived, I was so lonely, and had built such fine castles in the air, founded on her anticipated friendship, that I felt already grateful to my cousin, who was about to put me in a position to realize those enchanting hopes. I completely forgot my aunt's treacherous advice, and instead of thinking how to humiliate Ursula, I only thought of loving her.

She arrived at the *hôtel de Maran* the day after New Year's Day.

She was about a year older than myself, and by a strange peculiarity she had black hair and blue eyes, while on the contrary, I had black eyes and fair hair. We were about the same size. Ursula's features were, by no means, regularly formed ; but it was impossible to imagine a more interesting countenance, or a sweeter and more amiable smile.

The first time I saw her she was in mourning for her grandmother ; her black garments set off to still more advantage the rosy whiteness of her skin, and I thought her appearance so enchanting that I flung my arms round her neck and called her my sister. I cried in spite of myself, and those were the sweetest tears I had ever shed. My cousin received my caresses with a touching gracefulness, and then I conducted her to my room and placed all the treasures of my toilet at her disposal. Ursula displayed neither an awkward embarrassment nor an indiscreet forwardness. She told me with much emotion, that she was a suitor for my friendship, being herself almost an orphan, as her father treated her with extreme harshness.

I began to feel a world of new sensations in myself, and to comprehend the happiness of devoting oneself to protecting and defending a person whom one loves. I was almost obliged to Ursula for being poor, as I was rich ; for being almost forsaken, as

my heart was there ready to meet hers half-way and to offer the treasures of affection, which had been denied to her.

As soon as I had a friend to love, I fancied myself no longer a child ; I felt myself to be *quite a woman* (as the little girls say) and became very serious and thoughtful. I grew ashamed of my past coquetry, and I exclaimed to Ursula, pointing with great contempt to all my fine dresses—

“All that was very well when I was alone.”

As my cousin was in mourning I set my heart upon being dressed in black like her. This plan occupied my ideas all that night, and the next morning I boldly walked into Mademoiselle de Maran’s room, and said to her—

“Aunt, I want to be dressed in black like Ursula, and to be so as long as she is.”

“Why, my dear child, you must be mad,” replied my aunt with astonishment, “Ursula is in mourning, and you have nobody to mourn for.”

“May I not mourn for my mother ?” I answered with a downcast look of sadness.

My aunt burst out laughing, and exclaimed—

“How droll she is, with her queer, undertaker’s notions ! Why, you wore mourning for your mother seven years ago, and that is quite enough.”

“I wore it, aunt, without knowing that I wore it,” was my reply, while the tears came into my eyes, for my aunt’s laugh had painfully hurt me.

“God bless my soul, what funny ideas the child has,” answered Mademoiselle de Maran with another laugh, and chucking me under the chin, “come, come, you little madcap, this fine whim of yours shall be complied with ; you shall be dressed in black, but not in mourning, however, mind you, for that would be too ridiculous ; but you shall have some fine dresses of watered silk, while poor Ursula will only have woollen ones, which will make her nicely savage.”

“I don’t want to be dressed differently to my cousin, aunt.”

“So—so, it’s got to that already, has it ?” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, fixing her piercing eyes upon me. “Why this is even better than I expected. Come—come—make yourself easy ; as soon as the mourning is over, you shall be always dressed like two sisters ; you are quite rich enough to give your cousin a handsome dress now and then, as she has not got a farthing herself.”

“You don’t understand me, aunt,” I impatiently exclaimed ; “since Ursula is poor, I wish to be dressed like her, and not that she should be dressed like me.”

Mademoiselle de Maran again looked at me attentively, and said in her sarcastic manner—

“How is this ? What’s the child after to-day, with all this superlative delicacy ? How touching ! She is quite a chip of the old block !”

She then added, talking to herself, "After all, so much the better!" and addressing me, she continued—

"Vastly well, my child; you cannot treat Ursula too much like a sister. I am delighted to see you display symptoms of such excessive delicacy—such extreme sensibility. So much the better; I am agreeably surprised; you have surpassed my fondest hopes."

I was quite proud and happy when I left *Mademoiselle de Maran*, and I hurried to my governess, to tell her the result of my interview with my aunt. *Blondeau* embraced me with tears—but this time, tears of joy—and exclaimed, "Your own good heart has returned; I could almost fancy I hear the voice of your poor mother."

You might suppose that there was, at this period, a pause in *Mademoiselle de Maran's* evil designs against me; such, however, was by no means the case. Never, on the contrary, did she believe herself more certain of injuring me, both at the present time and in the future. But at that time I did not know, what I found out afterwards, and I yielded up myself, with happiness, to my exalted sentiments of affection towards my cousin, who, on her part, repaid me, by a most affectionate and grateful confidence.

Some days after Ursula's arrival at the *hôtel de Maran*, she knew all my little secrets. I had told her the history of my whole childhood, with the exception of my governess's sinister attempt, and it had cost me much, and did cost me much even then, to keep that secret to myself.

Although Ursula was a year older than myself, I was pretty nearly on a par with her as regarded our progress in instruction; our masters always gave the preference to my exercises over hers, either because they really deserved it, or by way of flattering my aunt, of whose secret designs my instructors thus became unwittingly the instruments.

Fearing to wound Ursula's self-love by my successes, I did all I could to palliate my superiority; I invented a thousand different ways of explaining away my little triumphs to my own disadvantage, hinting either that our masters placed me first in order to please *Mademoiselle de Maran*, or that Ursula herself was so fond of me, as to make mistakes purposely, that I might have the advantage.

I am not aware whether our dawning friendship interfered with *Mademoiselle de Maran's* projects, but she found out a fresh method of tormenting me more cruelly than ever.

Under the pretext of familiarising us little by little with society, my aunt sent for us occasionally into her drawing-room. She received company every evening; but several of her most intimate friends visited her between four and six o'clock.

You may conceive the painful feelings I experienced the first time I heard my aunt observe to some strangers, while pointing out myself and Ursula to their notice—

"Would you believe that my niece, who is a year younger than Mademoiselle d'Orbeval, and whose education commenced so much later, has been so assiduous in her application, and has made such astonishing progress that she is before her companion in everything. It is generally poor girls without fortune who work the most industriously. Here, however, the contrary is the case. Matilda, not satisfied with surpassing her cousin in wealth and beauty, is determined also to be her superior in education. That child, poor little dear, is a perfect treasure—she is the very image of her mother." And then Mademoiselle de Maran overwhelmed me with hypocritical caresses.

This was heart-breaking to me ; I gave Ursula a supplicating look, and we were scarcely alone when I threw myself with tears into her arms, and begged her to forgive me for the exaggerated and ridiculous praises with which my aunt overwhelmed me. My cousin, no less moved than myself, soothed my fears, and even joked me about them, proving by her daily increasing affection, that she was in no way jealous of my advantages, or hurt by the taunts of Mademoiselle de Maran. I then used every possible effort to let Ursula have the first place ; but it was in vain that I added blunder to blunder, I could not succeed in seeing Ursula's exercises preferred to mine. At last, one day I took it in my head to do no exercise at all, and my companion then, of necessity, obtained the first place.

Mademoiselle de Maran sent for us both down into her drawing-room, where there were still several visitors.

After a few words of common-place conversation, my aunt made me come to her, and said, addressing herself to a lady of the company—

"You will tell me that I am always repeating the same thing ; but old women have the privilege of talking nonsense when it is about their darlings. I see you smile, and you guess I refer to my little Matilda. It is true I dote upon her, and if you like to call it so, am quite infatuated with that child. Well then," continued my aunt, with that *good old woman's* sort of voice she always spoke in, when about to utter some spiteful observation—"I own it—I cannot help it. Now, for instance, compare Matilda and Ursula—and, by the bye, I must just give *manzelle* d'Orbeval a lesson." Then turning towards my cousin with a look of severity, my aunt went on to say, "Mademoiselle, you are poor, you profit by all your cousin's masters, and you are idle enough to permit Matilda, that angel of goodness, to neglect her own duties purposely, as she has done to-day, in order to leave you the first place, a distinction you have not energy enough to gain by your own application."

"But aunt !" I exclaimed, "Ursula knew nothing about it."

"What a good heart the little dear has got ! What generosity ! She actually takes her part !"

And my aunt again embraced me. Then continuing to address

my cousin with severity, who was crimson with shame, and had burst into tears, she said to her harshly—

“How is it that you are not ashamed of accepting, or, perhaps, exacting such sacrifices from this child?”

“But, madame!” exclaimed Ursula, “I assure you, I did not know—”

“That will do—that will do,” interrupted Mademoiselle de Maran. “I know what to think.”

And she sent us away after having once more tenderly embraced me. These caresses disgusted me; I was beginning to hate her worse than ever, for I began to have a presentiment that her diabolical malice was desirous of alienating my cousin's friendship from me.

After this scene I threw myself sobbing at Ursula's feet. The poor child returned my caresses, and thanked me for my expressions of attachment; but I could see that she suffered for a long time afterwards, and the more acutely, from her pride, and from her being naturally disinclined to confide her sorrows.

My only fear was, that my cousin should believe me capable of telling tales to my aunt, or at least of abetting, or being pleased with the praises she bestowed on me. I therefore resolved to declare open war against Mademoiselle de Maran, and to irritate her, at whatever cost, against me, so that I might prove to Ursula I was no *traitor*, and that I was desirous of having my share with her of my aunt's scoldings.

The question was, what great blow should be struck! My idleness and refusal to study, instead of making my aunt displeased with me, had brought down bitter reproaches upon Ursula; it was necessary therefore, that I should offend in some other way.

I meditated long upon this fine project, and Blondeau told me afterwards I looked quite grave, pensive, and pre-occupied. I showed still more attachment to Ursula; but I took every possible precaution, that she might not be accused of having been aware of my designs.

Among other projects of mischief, I had at one time thought of breaking a magnificent cup of Sèvres china, which Louis the Eighteenth had made a present to my aunt, and which was highly valued by her. Upon second thoughts, however, this idea did not satisfy me. The act might be attributed to awkwardness or carelessness; what I wanted, on the contrary, was something premeditated—some piece of good, open, inexcusable mischief. I next valiantly thought of setting fire to the drawing-room curtains; but the consequences of the blaze might endanger Ursula and Blondeau, and besides, that also might be attributed to accident.

In inventing these schemes of mischief, I was restrained by no scruples. I fancied I was going to do something quite noble and heroic; I felt my blood glow in my veins, and believed I should reach the sublimity of self-devotion.

While these mighty thoughts were busy in my brain, fatality threw in my way my aunt's wolf-dog Felix. I had an old score to settle with that spiteful brute, for his bites in former days. The very evening before, Ursula had felt his teeth ; but I confess that had he been a dog of the most amiable disposition, Mademoiselle de Maran's attachment for him would have been his great crime in my eyes, or rather the reason for selecting him as my victim.

I was well aware how furious my aunt became when any of the servants made Felix squeak, even by accident, and for a moment I was coward enough to tremble at the thought of Mademoiselle de Maran's rage. I believed her capable of killing me, if I undertook anything against her pet ; but my friendship for Ursula carried the day, and I determined to hazard all the consequences of my resolution.

I was alone in my aunt's parlour. Felix was lying in his kennel lined with velvet, and his head only was visible. Though desirous of doing him an injury, I was puzzled how to set about it ; for he was very savage, and always on his guard ; besides, a mere kick would not have served my purpose, or satisfied my revenge.

In retracing these childish details, my friend, I can scarcely refrain from smiling, and yet I never remember to have felt an emotion so profound and absorbing as I experienced at the moment I was about to accomplish my design.

Strange circumstance ! I have formed, in the course of my life, resolutions most important, and even most culpable, and yet, I repeat it, I never felt the fear, hesitation, and, if I may so call it, the anticipated remorse which crowded upon my mind, as I was about to commit a spiteful trick of childish mischief.

I confess my vengeance upon Felix was a barbarous one ; yet, I was not naturally cruel, and only the eagerness I felt to set my character right in Ursula's eyes, could have induced me to perpetrate such an atrocity. I was abominably wicked enough to put the tongs in the fire, and when they were red hot, I advanced thus formidably armed, and with great courage against the foe. Felix, as usual, rushed from his kennel, and flew at me ; but I seized one of his sharp ears so cleverly with the tongs, that he fell down with a horrible yell, without the energy or strength to regain his kennel. I had an instant's remorse when I saw the unfortunate animal's ear smoking, and heard his yells of pain ; but I stifled this movement of compassion, by the delightful thought that I should now be ill treated by my aunt, in the presence of Ursula.

I remained standing in a heroic attitude, my tongs in my hand, and my victim rolling at my feet.

Mademoiselle de Maran rushed in, frightened to death, and followed by her *maître d'hôtel*, who was no less alarmed.

"Good God ! what's the matter !" she exclaimed, throwing herself upon Felix, "what's the matter, my poor fellow ?"

Then perceiving one of his ears was completely burnt, she lifted up her head and furiously addressed me—

“You stupid little fool! you could not take the trouble of watching him, and preventing his going too near the fire. Servien—Servien—quick—some fresh water—some ice.”

Then with eyes starting out of her head with rage, and her lips covered with foam, my aunt, forgetting her usual affectionate manners, seized me by the arm, pinched me till the blood came, and exclaimed, “You could not take the trouble of watching him, you sneaking fool—you worthless wretch!”

Mademoiselle de Maran looked so frightful and so savage, that I hesitated for an instant. I might have left her in the belief that Felix’s burns were the consequence of my carelessness; but I soon overcame this cowardly weakness, and extricating myself from her hands, I showed her the tongs which I still held, and said to her, with an air of triumph—

“I made these tongs red hot, and I then burnt Felix’s ear with them, for the purpose.”

The last word was not out of my mouth, when I felt my aunt’s dry and bony fingers upon my cheek. The box on the ear she gave me was so violent, that it nearly knocked me down.”

Do not smile, my friend, but in spite of the pain and my dread of my aunt, I only thought of the *insult*, I became crimson with rage, and without well knowing what I was about, I threw the tongs with my whole strength at Mademoiselle de Maran.

Some fatality accomplished my purpose to the utmost; the tongs struck the magnificent cup of *Sèvres china*, and the royal gift was broken into a thousand pieces.

I remember, my friend, to have heard you analyse, with that true and correct judgment you possess, the emotion you used to feel when carried away and excited in war, by the involuntary instinct of slaughter. Well, at ten years old, my poor little head felt, by analogy, the same transport.

After this glorious victory—after burning the dog and smashing the cup, I ran about the parlour, intoxicated with pride and insensible to my aunt’s abuse and threats, crying out, with the whole strength of my lungs—

“Ursula! Ursula! come and look here.”

And then unable, doubtless, to resist any longer, the violent feelings which had for some minutes agitated me, I fainted completely away.

Fancy my delight, on recovering; I found myself in bed; my governess was at my pillow, and my cousin on her knees, holding my hands in hers.

I cannot describe to you the rapture and pride with which I remembered my courageous exploit; I was only afraid of hearing that my aunt’s passion had become appeased.

“Good God, my poor child!” said Blondeau, “how could you

have the heart, kind as you are, to hurt that poor dog so much ? I know he is as spiteful as the devil ; but, nevertheless, it was very cruel in you—”

“ And my aunt—my aunt—is she very angry ?” I impatiently broke in.

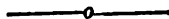
“ Angry !—Blessed JESUS !” replied Blondeau ; “ I believe she is too, she was in such a passion, that she went into hysterics, and when she came to herself, her first words were to order that you should be put upon bread and water for a week.”

“ Ah ! Ursula !” I exclaimed, flinging myself round my cousin’s neck.

“ This is not all, mademoiselle,” continued Blondeau, sadly “ your aunt is having a frock of coarse, grey cloth made for you, with a label to be pinned upon it, and you will be compelled to come down to the drawing-room with it to-morrow when there is company.”

“ Ursula ! Ursula ! you see she punishes me, also ! she humiliates me, also ! she hates me, also ! as much as she does you,” I exclaimed, supremely happy, and embracing my cousin.

“ Ah ! now I see it all,” said my governess ; and the excellent woman clasped her hands, and gazed on me with touching emotion.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE FIRST COMMUNION.

IN spite of her discernment and adroitness, Mademoiselle de Maran did not discover the motive of the vengeance I had taken upon Felix ; but thought that I had merely acted from my hatred and spite against the dog. The best consequences resulted from my courage ; Ursula seemed extremely touched by this so strange a proof of my friendship, and a closer and more tender tie appeared to unite us from that day.

I discovered that Ursula’s disposition was a far superior one to my own. I was often passionate, wilful, and obstinate ; my cousin, on the contrary, invariably displayed the most perfect patience and calmness ; her clear, mild glance, indeed, was occasionally veiled by a tear ; but was never lighted up by any violent emotion. Her destiny appeared to be suffering and the devotion of herself to others.

Mademoiselle de Maran seemed, little by little, to forget the crime I had committed, and continued to take every opportunity of exalting me at my cousin’s expense. Ursula, however, re-assured

by the proofs of affection which I exerted myself to show her, seemed henceforth insensible to my aunt's maliciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Soon after this, one of the most important events in the life of a young girl, who has ceased to be a child, *my first Communion*, awakened new and serious ideas in my heart. Mademoiselle de Maran attended to none of the outward performances of religion. Nothing in her language or in her manners betrayed any feelings of piety ; and she only caused us to accomplish this solemn act as a kind of duty owed to society.

Unfortunately the priest who was charged with our religious instruction, accomplished that sacred task also, as one of the *duties* of his profession.

Conforming himself to the mere letter of the sacred ceremony, he did not place its divine spirit within the reach of our youthful intelligence. He did not, for instance, represent confession to us as an act of pious and salutary confidence, to which the priest responds with consolation and pardon ; but, on the contrary, it was for us a painful and dreaded self-accusation.

This priest, who came every day to prepare us for the Communion, was called the Abbé Dubourg ; he was a man of harsh and morose disposition, and always seemed in a hurry to get to the end of our conversations.

His style of instruction was dry, cold, and almost contemptuous. He was an eloquent preacher, and had preached during two Lents with the greatest success, and was, I believe, extremely desirous of obtaining a Bishopric. Being well aware of the powerful influence possessed by my aunt, he had, from a motive of interest, accepted the office which he discharged towards us, though it doubtless was one which he looked upon as far beneath his learning and eloquence.

Now that I am able to compare and appreciate facts, I am of opinion that the Abbé Dubourg's instructions were in no degree different from those of our other teachers ; he merely gave us *lessons in religion*, and nothing else.

Alas ! those young girls are happy, indeed, whose religious education has been developed and fertilized by the tenderness of a mother—a mother, that holy mediatrix between her child and God !

Should not—if I may be allowed the expression—should not the glowing rays of divine light be only permitted to penetrate the natures of children, tender and delicate as they are, through the medium of a mother's love ? Otherwise the effect upon that feeble age is, to dazzle without enlightening.

And yet that religious instinct which then, and ever since, has existed in my bosom, threw some light, though a confused one, upon the holiness of the act I was about to accomplish. But, in my ignorance, I measured that magnificent symbol, whose immensity

embraces all mankind, by the narrow rule of my own personal feelings.

To receive the Communion with Ursula was, in my eyes, to take the solemn engagement of ever being a Christian sister to her in the presence of the Almighty himself, and I thus concentrated upon her the unlimited devotion which religion demands from us all.

Our Communion at the altar was, to me, a holy and eternal consecration of our friendship. I know, oh, my God, that the sacred law extends to all, and not to one alone ; but, surely the Saviour, in His infinite mercy, must have looked with an eye of pity upon those two, poor, orphan children, who, in their ingenuous enthusiasm, placed their touching and sisterly affection under the ægis of one of religion's most imposing mysteries.

\* \* \* \* \*

From that day the ties which bound us appeared to me indissoluble ; we formed the most extravagant projects ; we were never to separate, never to marry ; but to live like Mademoiselle de Maran ; and this old maid's existence was arrayed in such charming colours by our friendship, that such a future lot appeared to us, the most enviable one in the world.

No events of any importance marked the three or four years which followed my first communion. My only sorrow was, in always finding myself more elegantly dressed than my cousin, in spite of my entreaties to the contrary, and in hearing Mademoiselle de Maran talk in the following manner, to her visitors, before me and Ursula :—

"It is really incredible how a few years change people's features. Just look at Matilda now, for instance, she was only a pretty child ; well, now as she grows up, her beauty is becoming so accomplished and remarkable, that people turn back to look at her. Ursula, on the contrary, who used to have rather a nice little face, is growing up a perfect fright, and she has such a common—common look ! while her cousin is so *very* distinguished in appearance. But, alas ! my child," would Mademoiselle de Maran add, addressing Ursula, in a tone of hypocritical resignation, and with her "*good sort of a woman*" look, "what is to be done ? We must resign ourselves, and put up with it all. Gracefulness or beauty was never the *forte* of our branch of the family ! I can bear witness to that—I, who am as ugly as the seven capital sins, and as hump-backed as a bag of nuts. By-the-bye," continued my aunt, addressing some of her complaisant friends, "don't you think Ursula's figure is *rather* crooked, a *little* bent ? Very little, certainly ; but still there is *something* wrong there, decidedly—is there not ? It is a kind of family reminiscence on the father's side."

Mademoiselle de Maran's toadies were certain to give but a feeble contradiction to these assertions, and my aunt would then exclaim—

"What a difference there is in Matilda ! Her's is a real fairy figure, as straight as a reed, and as flexible as an osier twig ; there is not a single young person of her age who unites, as she does, gracefulness to dignity, and intellect to beauty. How can we help it ! As for you, my poor Ursula, who have not all these fine qualities, take my advice, and by way of consoling yourself for being so inferior to your cousin, in every respect, content yourself with admiring her ; for, be assured that, to admire others, is the consolation of ugly people, with noble natures ; and this will be so much the more meritorious on your part, as you never look so ugly as when one compares you to Matilda. It is just like myself ; I never appeared so frightful as when I was in company with a young and beautiful woman ; but, as I tell you, I used to comfort myself by admiring *her*. And after all, you have a thousand reasons for loving Matilda ; your friendship for her delights me ; for it proves that you are, at all events, not ungrateful. Has not your cousin bestowed upon you the most magnificent gift in the world, that of a splendid education ? You would never have had that education without her. Do you suppose your father could have afforded you masters at a *louis* a lesson ? Once for all, you do no more than your duty, in loving and blessing your cousin ; for, thanks to her, you may be able, by your instruction and talents, to make people forget that you are as ugly as she is charming."

Nothing could be more treacherous, more odious, and more dangerous than these censures and praises on our physical advantages and defects.

I could never understand that false modesty which consists in denying one's own beauty. Personal advantages do not depend on oneself, and if one is beautiful, to confess it is not vanity—it is merely telling the truth. I conceive, on the other hand, that one should maintain the most scrupulous and diffident reserve in appreciating talents or advantages which are merely acquired ones.

I believe, then, that at sixteen or seventeen, I was really handsome, certainly not so handsome as Mademoiselle de Maran pretended ; but, still, enough so, to justify, in some degree, her praises, if they had not been so cruelly exaggerated. It was just the same with the censures of which she was so lavish on my cousin. Ursula's figure was tall, slender, and perfectly straight ; but the malicious observations of my aunt assumed some appearance of reality, from the fact that Ursula, like a great many young persons who have grown up quickly, had a slight habit of stooping. It is, therefore, easy to see what art and system my aunt employed in her perfidious comparisons. It was the same system that she had employed since my childhood. In one point of view, she spoke the truth ; and, moreover, the weapon she used was a two-edged one. My aunt wished to inflict a painful wound upon Ursula's vanity, and to raise my self-love to a ridiculous point. If even the most false ideas, and

the most notorious lies, by being incessantly repeated, and by leaving a deep impression on our minds, what must be the case when there is some slight appearance of truth to confirm them. My cousin had finished at last by believing herself to be completely destitute of every charm, and my assurances to the contrary were considered by her as merely dictated by a feeling of affectionate pity on my part, and she used to reply—

“Good Heavens! how kind you are to attempt to console me in this manner! I do not deceive myself; Mademoiselle de Maran is quite right; you are as beautiful as I am ugly, and I have made up my mind to my fate.”

Doubtless, my cousin's language on these occasions was sincere; and nothing at that time could have made me suppose that my aunt had attained her end, and that the seed of bitter jealousies sown by her, was already shooting forth in that heart, once so candid and pure.

But alas! the future will prove if it was not a crime—a great crime—for Mademoiselle de Maran (who had sounded the most hidden and the darkest recesses of the human heart) to have even run the risk of awakening in Ursula's soul, that most frightful, savage, and implacable of all the passions—envy.

The other risk—I mean that of developing my self-love to an immoderate degree, was less serious. By acting thus, my aunt was doing me a service, though an involuntary one, for she put me on my guard for ever against all exaggerated flatteries.

What renders flattery so dangerous is, the custom and consciousness of having been praised with tenderness, tact, and truth. In such a case, one gives oneself blindly up to the charm of those kind words, and they recal to your mind a past, full of confidence, love, and sincerity.

How irresistible must be the enchanting power of a flattery which seems merely to be the continuation of a mother's praises!

\* \* \* \* \*

When I talked to Ursula about our childhood's projects of remaining single, and to which projects I still adhered, she would say with a melancholy smile—

“It will be all very well for me to remain an old maid, for I have not even the dowry of beauty or accomplishments; but you, with your wealth, beauty, and charms, will marry and be happy. And oh! keep a little place in your heart and house for your poor Ursula, so that I may be an incessant witness of your happiness.”

Alas! fatality sometimes turns our prayers and our hopes into the bitterest derision.

I was now seventeen, and my cousin and myself had scarcely ever been out of the *hôtel de Maran*. We went, indeed, sometimes to the *Bouffons*, or the Opera, with my guardian, M. d'Orbeval; but we had never yet been presented in the world.

He wore in all seasons of the year, a green spencer, lined with Astracan fur, underneath which was a black coat, with broad skirts. Nothing on earth would have induced him to get into a carriage, from fear of being overturned, and sometimes in the muddiest and most rainy weather, he would come to Mademoiselle de Maran's, in a state that was really pitiable. He was full of talent, knowledge, and goodness ; but had one incurable mania, that of touching, putting out of its place, and sometimes breaking, everything that was before him. This used to put my aunt into tremendous passions ; but she soon became appeased again, being very fond of discussing scientific subjects with a man of such high reputation as M. Bisson.

I shall never forget a beautiful *Petitot* enamelled snuff-box, of which my aunt was imprudent enough to let him get hold, in the middle of a dissertation upon one of the last reports on Etruscan vases, that had been read at the Academy of Sciences, by, I believe, the Duke de Luynes.

M. Bisson began, by innocently rolling about the precious box in his hands. By degrees, the conversation became animated, and Mademoiselle de Maran grew unmeasured in her attacks, denying even what was self evident, rather than confess herself beaten. The great scholar, exasperated by some false assertion of my aunt's (I forget what) exclaimed, striking the chimney-piece violently at the same time—

“ No ! madame—no, no, no—a thousand times, no ! ”

Each “ no ” was accompanied by a vigorous knock of the snuff-box upon the marble, and it was only from the cloud of snuff, and the shower of enamel chips, which were suddenly scattered about, that my aunt perceived the destruction of her fragile toy.

“ Oh ! the frightful break-all ! ” she exclaimed, in a passion—“ what's he been destroying now ?—why, it is my *Petitot* snuff-box ! Ah ! the wretch ! For God's sake, sir, do keep quiet—you are throwing snuff into my eyes—you are blinding me. Once, for all, I forbid you ever to set foot in my house again—do you hear ?—my *Petitot* snuff-box ! The other day it was a sugar-plum box, of variegated rock crystal—a sugar-plum box which cost fifty *louis*—if you will believe me, that he broke to pieces, while telegraphing about with his great arms. Get out of my house, I entreat you—get out of my house—your scientific conversation costs me a great deal too dear, not to mention that you have a disagreeable habit of coming here looking for all the world like a thief, and bringing with you all the different muds of the Paris streets.”

“ You may say what you like, madame,” exclaimed M. Bisson in a passion. “ I will never get into a carriage ; I am determined—I would rather dirty your carpet than break my own neck ! ” And this was all the great scholar said about the accident to the snuff-box.

“ I tell you what it is, M. Bisson,” said my aunt, “ I wish you would leave me at peace ; you'll drive me beside myself ; just

be kind enough to go away directly, and mind you never come back again.

"And where, do you think, I am to go to? It is only half-past two, and I do not want to be at the Institute before half-past three," replied M. Bisson, throwing himself into an arm-chair, and taking up a screen, which he began to pull to pieces.

"Don't ask me where you are to go to," screamed Mademoiselle de Maran, in a fury. "Is my house intended as a place of refuge for idle members of the Institute? Good God! what's he doing now? That's right, he is breaking one of my screens now. It is really past all endurance—such a mischievous being is a perfect pest—a complete plague!" And Mademoiselle de Maran was compelled to snatch the screen (already considerably damaged) out of M. Bisson's hands.

"It is really astonishing what little solid work there is now-a-days; that comes of the present exaggerated mania for production," observed M. Bisson with a meditative air, as he took up a little chimney-brush, and began to stir the fire with it, which put my aunt into a still more violent passion.

We used to be much diverted with scenes of this description, which were, indeed, of constant occurrence; for M. Bisson would come back again, at the end of two or three days, quite forgetting all that had happened, and Mademoiselle de Maran could not bear a grudge against him.

After receiving company in the morning, we dined with Mademoiselle de Maran, who, detesting restraint, never invited any body. She kept an excellent table, was a great *gourmande*, and indulged a whim which was to us a source of insuperable disgust, Her *maître d'hôtel*, Servien, used to take every dish upon the table to her, and she tasted them all; she would often—you must excuse these details, my friend—help us with her fingers, and she then made her dog, Felix, who was at that time an invalid, sometimes dine out of her plate.

The time occupied by dinner was a perfect torture to us. We went back into the drawing-room for a moment or two, and stopped there till Mademoiselle de Maran fell fast asleep in her arm-chair, an invariable custom of hers. Her servants had orders never to awake her, and to request any persons who might, by chance, have arrived on an early evening visit, to wait in another drawing-room.

About eight o'clock, I and Blondeau went up with Ursula, into our own room, where we talked, read, and played music, till it was time for tea. We never appeared at Mademoiselle de Maran's *soirées*, who received but few ladies, and those, generally, about her own age.

You may conceive, my friend, that, accustomed as we were, to this monotonous life, we naturally became rather dazzled at the prospect of balls and parties, held out to us by my aunt. Our first

feeling was a joyous one ; but reflection by degrees turned our mirth into melancholy.

The night before the ball was, to me, a singularly disturbed one, and I became more sad and gloomy as the hour of this much talked of *fête* approached. I had never had the felicity of enjoying a mother's love, and never, perhaps, did I more regret it than at that instant. I have since learnt by experience, that my instinct did not deceive me ; for, true it is, that the protecting and imposing tenderness of a mother is never so indispensable as when we make our first entrance on the stage of society.

Every body knows that the ceremonious appearance of a young girl at those parties, to which the duties of education have hitherto kept her a stranger, encourages and authorizes, as it were, the pretensions of those who are privileged to ask her in marriage, and whether with or without reason, there is commonly so much confidence in the sagacity of a mother's heart, that certain projects, and certain hopes, which neither deserve nor are likely to succeed, are afraid to expose themselves to that maternal penetration, which is at once so attentive and so distrustful.

When, on the other hand, a young girl happens to be an orphan, however great the affection she may be presumed to rely upon, she is, nevertheless, believed, nay, known to be more isolated and less protected, and if rich, she is looked upon as a species of prey, or prize, if you prefer the expression, to which all and every one choose to put in their claim.

Without being able to account so clearly for the uneasy feeling which kept me restless half the night, I yet had a kind of vague foreshadowing of these thoughts, and I was affronted—almost, indeed, irritated, at the idea that strangers were about to examine me, comment upon me, calculate my fortune, and weigh my advantages of birth, for the purpose of giving me a more or less advantageous class among the girls in the matrimonial market. And I fancied that I should feel none of these scruples, were I accompanied by a mother.

I had another cause of dissatisfaction, almost, indeed, of actual grief ; for, without agreeing with my aunt's prejudices against my cousin, I was yet so accustomed to hear Mademoiselle de Maran call Ursula ugly and unaccomplished, that I ended by fearing the world would confirm my aunt's judgment, and that my friend would find out she had made a complete failure.

I dreaded lest Ursula, when once in the full glare of society, should, in spite of her sweet disposition, be jealous of the frivolous advantages which I possessed over her, and lest that jealousy should, perchance, be converted into a feeling still more bitter—that of hatred.

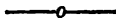
Hitherto, at least, her self-love had never suffered except in the presence of a few friends of Mademoiselle de Maran's ; but what would be the result, if it should be cruelly and publicly wounded by

a contemptuous indifference ? I can assure you my friend, that this was, perhaps, my greatest anxiety, so precious, in my eyes, was Ursula's friendship. Besides, without saying a word to her about my plans, I was seriously considering how I should share my own fortune with her. Nor was this one of those exaggerated feelings which the impetuosity of youth forgets almost as soon as it has conceived ; it was, on the contrary, a resolution steadily formed, and to realize which, more effectually, I had determined to say nothing to my aunt on the subject ; but to lay down this gift to Ursula as the first clause in my marriage contract.

You will, doubtless, laugh, my friend, at my simplicity in *affairs of interest*, as people call them, but I thank Heaven that I did not understand them better or sooner than I did, for to that ignorance I have been indebted for some happy moments.

At last the day of the ball arrived. In spite of her ugliness and careless style of dress, Mademoiselle de Maran's taste was exquisite, and her constant habit of criticising everything, and her detestation of all that was young and beautiful, had rendered her so difficult to please, that what she approved was sure to be faultless. She had had two beautiful and exactly similar dresses made for us. In after years I have asked myself how Mademoiselle de Maran could have been so generous as not to have made me ridiculous by some glaring instance of bad taste either in my dress or in the way my hair was arranged ; she might easily have done this, and the ridicule would have long stuck to me, for the world's first impression is often an indelible one ; but my aunt was above so paltry a revenge. She wanted, and she obtained a deadlier one.

Were I not afraid of disturbing the order of events, by mentioning to you here, circumstances which I did not learn till much later, you would perceive, my friend, that at this period of my life, I was already almost hemmed in by that hatred which Mademoiselle de Maran had set in motion against me with a certainty of foresight which proved she possessed a most deep and most fatal knowledge of the human heart.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BALL.

EARLY in the morning Ursula and myself began to converse upon the important events that were to take place that evening. I found my cousin was in very low spirits, with no confidence in herself, and determined not to go to the ball. She told me she had spent the night in tears ; she did not, however, look either pale or fatigued ; but had merely a melancholy expression on her counte-

nance, which lent it fresh charms. I can see her now, with her head drooping, her forehead concealed by her masses of dark hair, scarcely in appearance able to support herself upright, her hands crossed upon her knees, and sighing every now and then, as she raised her eyes, veiled by tears, towards heaven.

"Ursula, Ursula, my sister!" I exclaimed, tenderly embracing her; "take courage, I beseech you; dismiss your terrors; am I not with you? I who am as ignorant as yourself of that world we are about to enter, and our dread of which, is a childish one, I am certain. No one will take any notice of us, and by degrees we shall grow quite accustomed to our situation. As we are always together, it will be a happiness to confide to each other our mutual observations. Well, then, even if we are awkward and embarrassed on this our first appearance, we shall still be able, take my word for it, to communicate some little malicious discovery to each other."

Ursula smiled, and replied, while she tenderly pressed my hands within her own—

"Forgive me, Matilda; but I really cannot tell you how afraid I feel of the world. Never—never, I am certain, shall I be able to grow accustomed to it; nor is this mere childishness; it is, on the contrary, the natural dictate of conscience and duty; surely—surely, when, like me, one is without beauty, riches, or accomplishments, it does not become one to push forward, but to remain in obscurity, and not to meet contempt half way. For you it is all very well; you have every requisite for appearing with brilliant success in the world; go, therefore, into that world alone. I will wait at home for you, and my happiness shall be, to hear you relate your success. As for all these splendid *fêtes*, why, I shall see them through your eyes, and that will be sufficient for me." And then she added, smiling gracefully—"Come, come, I will be a Cinderella—not the unhappy and forgotten one of the fairy tale; but a voluntary Cinderella, happy in seeing you beautiful and admired! Yes, when you return from the ball, quite tired of pleasure, quite satiated with flatteries, my glance of tender uneasiness shall welcome you, and you shall repose from your successes in the calm of my friendship."

If, my friend, you had seen and heard Ursula at that moment, you would have thought her, notwithstanding the irregularity of her features, not merely beautiful, but actually enchanting. Her emotion gave so pure—so sweet an intonation to her voice, her blue eyes had so gentle, so imposing an expression, that one was irresistibly subjugated.

"Ursula!" I exclaimed, "how can you be so distrustful of yourself, when you can look and talk in that manner? I who am your sister—I who have never quitted you—I who ought to have become accustomed to your voice and look, I myself think you so beautiful at this moment, that were I capable of jealousy, I should

be jealous of you. You do not know—you have never, if I may say so, seen yourself. Believe me, then, in spite of Mademoiselle de Maran's spiteful observations, and in spite of your own distrust, you are really charming. Do you think your sister would deceive you? Come, Ursula—come, my friend, take courage; let us be brave—let us meet this awful day with resolution, and to-morrow, perhaps, we shall laugh at ourselves. In a word, I declare I will not go to this ball, unless you accompany me."

"Matilda, do not insist upon it, I implore you."

"Ursula, I implore you in my turn."

"I cannot."

"Ursula, this is cruel; you know my aunt will reproach you with having refused to go to this ball, in order to prevent my going there; you know her—you know how miserable it makes me when I see you unjustly reproved. Well, then, will you cause me so much pain? Ursula, my sister, if you refuse me, it will be the same as telling me I am indifferent to your troubles, and surely, that is a reproach which I do not deserve."

"Ah! Matilda, how can you speak so?" exclaimed my cousin. "I will hesitate no longer; I will go to this ball."

As the fatal moment approached, I became more and more uneasy; not so much, however, on my own account, as on Ursula's. Notwithstanding the seeming security I displayed, I knew not whether she would look well in her ball dress. In order that my first impression of her appearance might be sufficiently vivid, instead of going to attend her toilet, I went down into the drawing-room, as soon as I was dressed myself, and I found there Mademoiselle de Maran and the Duke de Versac, who was to accompany us to the Embassy.

I have no longer, my friend, any pretensions to admiration, so far distant are now my first days of beauty and youth; and I am now so little like what I was then, that I can talk to you of Matilda at seventeen, as of a stranger; and, besides, the very knowing how to say "I was beautiful," is an act of courage, modesty, and humility.

Imagine, then, your friend, about ten years ago in the full bloom of her youth; her light hair in bands, adorned with a spray of crimson heath, and dressed in a white crape robe of the utmost simplicity, trimmed only with three large *bouquets* of the wild heath, similar to those in her hair.

The Dauphiness had been so extremely kind as to select these rare Cape flowers herself from the hot houses at Meudon, and to send them to Mademoiselle de Maran.

My waist was extremely slender, and M. de Versac, I believe, as I was putting on my gloves, complimented me on my well rounded arm. I must say nothing about my foot and hand, for they, and they only are still unchanged.

Mademoiselle de Maran must have thought me looking extremely to advantage, perhaps too much so, for when she looked at me, she could not help frowning, notwithstanding she was so accustomed to bestow upon me the most exaggerated praises. She nevertheless checked this first impulse, and said to M. de Versac—

"Is not that dear girl quite charming, and as beautiful as a star?"

"She is, luckily, so sensible, that we need not fear to praise her beauty to her face," replied M. de Versac with a smile.

Mademoiselle de Maran wore one of her eternal dresses of *carmélite* silk, and she had on—a thing I never saw her wear before—a very plain cap, adorned with a bunch of marigolds.

I waited uneasily for Ursula, who, at last, made her appearance.

Do not accuse me of exaggeration, my friend, when I tell you that I scarcely recognised her, so wonderfully improved was her appearance.

She was *coiffée* to perfection. Her magnificent, dark hair, parted in the middle of her forehead, fell down on each side of her cheeks in long ringlets, descending nearly to her shoulders; her pale complexion, with its slight rosy tinge; her half veiled glance; her gentle and melancholy smile, seemed to personify in her the very ideal of a dreamy melancholy, an expression of countenance quite unattainable by features which are merely of a regular cast of beauty.

One might say that a melancholy countenance would seem to be mourning for the want of some perfection, so that it acquires even a fresh grace from that kind of modest distrust of itself. In reading Shakspeare, I have always summoned to my memory Ursula, as she appeared the night of that ball, in order to realize the great poet's Ophelia to my fancy. Instead of the slight stoop for which she was generally remarkable, my cousin proved, by the extreme flexibility of her gait, that her figure was perfect, and yet, as she even then kept her forehead slightly bent down, like a flower bending upon its stalk, this very movement which gave a curve of exquisite elegance to her neck, increased still more the fascination of her appearance. You might read upon her countenance a melancholy, checked with gentleness, which moved among the world's pleasures without sharing them. Ursula's look, which was almost an imploring one, seemed, in short, to ask forgiveness for her remaining insensible to pleasures from which some sorrowful pre-occupation took all interest in her eyes.

I was used to see Ursula suffering and resigned; but on that day she was sorrow itself and resignation, *poeticised*, or, as I should say now, dressed out on purpose for the ball.

But, alas! epigrams will not avenge me for the cruel mischief that *friend* inflicted. Could I believe such dissimulation? And yet, no, no; it is not her I ought to accuse, but Mademoiselle de

Maran, whose insidious taunts—but, these melancholy discoveries will arrive only too soon—let us return to my history.

I had eagerly approached Ursula, to take her hand, and to congratulate her upon being so enchanting.

M. de Versac exclaimed—

“For Heaven’s sake, stand so, with your hands joined, for a minute! What an adorable contrast! You, Matilda, beautiful—bewitching—radiant with happiness and grace; you will be the queen of all our parties—and you, Ursula, a touching image of that melancholy which smiles even while the tears are in its eyes.”

Mademoiselle de Maran burst into a loud laugh, and said to M. de Versac—

“Why do you stop half way in such a fine path? Pray continue till you get to a comparison between the haughty rose and the humble violet. What nonsense you talk, with your adorable contrasts! The rose has nearly a hundred thousand *livres* a-year, and the violet has not got a half-penny; that’s the reason why one holds her head upright, and why the other keeps hers down with such modesty.”

M. de Versac’s comparison, Mademoiselle de Maran’s spiteful remarks, and, perhaps, the sight of Ursula, whom I had never seen looking so pretty, gave me, for the first time in my life, a feeling of jealousy, which, however, yielded to dissatisfaction with myself.

Not in the least doubting my aunt’s words, I fancied that I had the look of haughty satisfaction which is bestowed by wealth, and I envied Ursula’s interesting modesty, which gave such a touching charm to her features. Doubtless, this evil thought was of short duration—doubtless, I was ashamed of my own want of generosity in envying my cousin—my dearest friend—the very interest which her poverty created, doubtless, in short, had it not been for my aunt’s malicious observation, I should never have felt that movement of jealousy, excusable, perhaps, since I, the rich one, envied her, the poor. But, still, this feeling left an impression of bitterness behind it.

Just as we were setting off, M. de Versac said to Mademoiselle de Maran—

“Dear me, what a memory I have got! Gontran returned from England this morning, and I never told you a word about it.”

“Your nephew? Well, then, there is a partner already, for these young ladies.”

I looked at Ursula with astonishment; for, neither M. de Versac nor Mademoiselle de Maran had ever mentioned this nephew’s name in our presence.

We were just getting into the carriage, when one of my aunt’s most intimate friends came and begged for a short interview with her, upon an affair of great consequence.

Mademoiselle de Maran went into her library, and M. de Versac took up the evening paper.

Under pretence of putting a pin right, in my *coiffure*, I took Ursula into Mademoiselle de Maran's room, and throwing myself into her arms, I frankly confessed the movement of jealousy I had felt, and with tears in my eyes, implored her forgiveness.

My frankness moved Ursula, also, to tears, and she comforted me with the most tender professions of affection. I then returned into the drawing-room with a calm and happy heart, and the firm resolution—as I had told Ursula—of endeavouring *not to look like an heiress*.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE INTRODUCTION.

ON entering the first *salon* of the Embassy, accompanied by M. de Versac, I felt my resolution fail me, and it required the very graceful and kind reception given me, by the Ambassadors of Austria, to restore me, in some degree, to myself.

Mademoiselle de Maran entered, with Ursula leaning on her arm.

I had never been able to appreciate so well, the influence exercised by my aunt, and the terror which she inspired; the most agreeable and most fashionable woman of the day could not have received more attention, or have been the object of more gallantry, on her entrance into the ball-room, than was Mademoiselle de Maran, and she received the deference, and the eager homage of the company with a most lofty air, and a patronising, nay, almost a contemptuous affability.

As we proceeded to the side of the gallery, where the dancing was going on, M. de Versac, who gave me his arm, pointed out to me the most distinguished persons present. We stopped for an instant near one of the doors of the gallery, and I there heard the following words, which passed between two persons whom I was, however, unable to see:—

“Well, I suppose you have heard that Lancry has returned from England; I have just seen him; he is more brilliant than ever.”

“Indeed! he is really come back, then,” was the reply. “How glad the Duchess de Richeville must be, for she has worn her weeds ever since he went—poor woman!”

I perceived, by a hasty movement, which M. de Versac made to force a way through the crowd, that he wished to divert my atten-



The Ball at the Austrian Embassy.



tion from this conversation, which it was not becoming I should hear, and of which his nephew, M. Gontran de Lancry, was the hero. I followed M. de Versac, without thinking much, at the time, of this incident ; before I had entered the ball-room, I fancied I should be embarrassed by every thing—by my countenance, my gait, and my very look ; but when the first emotion was passed, and I was once in the midst of that society to which I belonged, I felt, not exactly restored to confidence, but, (if I may use the expression) as if I were among my own connections. We scarcely ever feel restraint or timidity except when we enter a sphere either above or below our own, and I soon recovered my powers of observation.

On entering the dancing gallery, I was almost dazzled by the splendour and magnificence of the various dresses. Madame de Mirecourt, a friend of my aunt's, and who was acting as *chaperon* to a young lady recently married, offered to make room for us near herself ; Mademoiselle de Maran accepted the offer, and Ursula and myself sat down between Madame de Mirecourt and my aunt. M. de Versac now left us, to bring his nephew, whom he wished to introduce to us.

"Well," I said in a low voice to my cousin, "it is not so very terrible after all. Do you feel a little more courageous now ?"

"No," replied Ursula, "I cannot conquer my emotion ; I still tremble, and I can scarcely perceive what is going on near us."

"For my part," I gaily replied, "I can perceive very well," and to encourage her a little, I added, "I must confess I think it is a beautiful sight. What a pity you cannot enjoy it ! A ball is, decidedly, a very pretty thing."

As I was speaking thus, with an artless joy, my aunt, by whose side I was sitting, burst out into a loud laugh. Several persons, who were standing up before us, in the intervals of a waltz, turned round, and Madame de Mirecourt, who was on the other side of Ursula, leaned forward, and said to my aunt—

"What, in the world, are you laughing at ?"

"How can one help it, in the company of that little satirical darling ?" replied Mademoiselle de Maran, attracting her friend's notice to me. "If you could only hear the droll and malicious remarks she makes—it is enough to kill one. You had better look to yourself ; for she bites pretty sharply, I can tell you."

Then turning to me, my aunt added, in a lower voice, and in a kind of affectionately scolding manner—"Will you be good enough, mademoiselle, not to be so witty ? People will say I have taught you to be so malicious."

All this was said in a subdued tone of voice, and yet so as to be heard by all who were near us. I looked at my aunt with the utmost astonishment, and Ursula asked me, in a whisper, "what

droll remark I had made to Mademoiselle de Maran, and what absurdity I had been ridiculing ?”

“ Why, none at all,” was my reply ; “ I do not understand a word of what she has been talking about.”

Now, my friend, I will explain the enigma :—

My aunt was beginning to represent me as that satirical personage which you yourself long believed me to be, and which, by the way, was one of your strongest prejudices against me.

Thus, thanks to Mademoiselle de Maran’s perfidious observations, several persons standing before us (one of whom, the kind and charming Lady Fitz-Allan, told me this afterwards) thought that I had been turning them into ridicule. It was my first appearance in the world, and for several reasons, which you can easily understand, I was an object of some attention, so that my aunt’s exclamation, at my *malicious observations*, was sure to spread, and did, in fact, spread everywhere in an instant.

No reputation is more fatal to a woman than that of being satirical, even though she be wittily so. She is feared and calumniated by fools, becomes an object of jealousy to clever, and of repugnance to good-natured and generous persons ; and so before I had been at the ball for half an hour, I already had my enemies.

Lady Fitz-Allan has since told me, that my satirical disposition was, for an instant, the topic of the ball-room, and people talked of nothing else but Mademoiselle Mathilde de Maran’s bitter irony ; this was the name I now went by, in order to distinguish me from my aunt.

No one, indeed, had actually heard my sarcasms ; but, as it invariably happens, every body was talking about them.

My aunt wished to put the finishing hand to her work, and a few minutes afterwards, during a fresh pause in the waltz, she said to Ursula, so loud, that every body could hear her—

“ God bless my soul, my poor child, don’t look so serious and melancholy ; do, appear a little in accordance with your age, if you can ; what do you mean by this shyness ?”

These words of my aunt’s, which were listened to, repeated, and commented upon, established, as a positive fact, that I was as satirical and giddy, as my cousin was timid, sensible, and thoughtful.

You know the world, my friend—you know how rarely it is turned from its first impressions, and hence you will understand what a powerful influence these few words of my aunt’s were able to exert over my future destiny.

Alas ! I must confess that my own inexperience and vanity increased, still more, the effect of these mischievous insinuations ; afterwards, indeed, I bitterly lamented that I had ever acquired such a reputation for satire ; but, at first, I was weak enough to

feel almost flattered by, and proud of, the unenviable distinction. I thought myself handsome, and in my opinion, this character for irony was a certificate of my wit.

At the end of the waltz, M. de Versac approached my aunt, with his nephew, M. Gontran de Lancry.

I confess I became almost motionless with surprise, at the sight of M. de Lancry, who was then about thirty years of age. It would be difficult to find a man more thoroughly agreeable, or one of a more seductive appearance.

I fancy, my friend, you will be astonished at the impartiality with which I am going to describe M. de Lancry to you. Indeed, in writing these lines, I have been myself surprised, at my ability of recalling my first impressions with such faithfulness, and yet, of isolating them, at the same time, from the impressions which afterwards succeeded them. Judge what power I possess over myself, or rather how melancholy must be the state of my heart, when I can so calmly and coolly describe to you, M. de Lancry, as he then was.

Alas ! I shall not always, perhaps, possess the same firmness. Perhaps, hereafter, some dear, but cruel, remembrances will make my hand tremble with a painful emotion, while it relates some of the passages of my life.

At all events, I will attempt to recal the impressions I then felt, and do not smile if I enter into some details which may appear childish. I was then extremely young, and I had never seen, at Mademoiselle de Maran's, any person capable of being compared, in any respect, to M. de Lancry.

He had formerly been one of the King's pages, and had served with great distinction in Spain. He had afterwards been attached, as *chevalier d'honneur*, to an important embassy, had, at the end of a few years, given up the military profession, and had been named one of the Gentlemen of the Chamber to the King, thanks to his Majesty's kindness, and to the protection of M. de Versac.

I can recal, with rare precision, our first interview at the Austrian Ambassador's ball. There had been a grand reception at the *château*, and many of the gentlemen who had places at Court, had come to the ball in uniform. M. de Lancry, among the rest, had just left the Tuileries ; he wore the brilliant dress peculiar to the office he filled, had round his neck the red ribbon and golden cross of a Commander of the *Légion d'honneur*, and wore, beside, the showy insignia of a foreign order.

M. de Lancry was of the middle size ; but his figure was exquisitely elegant ; his features, which were perfectly regular, were—to use my aunt's expression, which was true enough—those of “some young Athenian Greek ; but animated with all the quickness and grace of a Parisian.” He was, she would say, “*the very ideal of prettiness*.” He had chesnut-coloured hair, dark eyes, beautiful teeth, and a hand and foot which a woman might have

envied. I told you, just now, he was about thirty years of age ; but he did not look five and twenty.

No wonder, then, that such physical advantages, set off, as they were, by those honorable distinctions, which are generally the privilege of more mature years, and which always seem to announce merit in the wearer, should have rendered M. de Lancry a most remarkable personage.

As he approached my aunt, she extended her hand to him, and said—

“ Good evening, my dear Gontran ; your uncle has only just told me that you had returned from London. Well, what have you been about in that delightful place ? ”

M. de Lancry smiled, went close up to Mademoiselle de Maran, and whispered a few words, which I was unable to hear.

“ Will you hold your tongue ! ” exclaimed my aunt, laughing, and she added, “ Luckily, you may tell anything to an old mother hunchback like me ; but, still, by way of penance, you shall dance with these little girls.”

Then turning to me, my aunt said to M. de Lancry, with that extremely dignified look which she could put on, better than any one, when she liked—

“ My niece, Mademoiselle Mathilde de Maran.”

M. de Lancry bowed respectfully.

“ Our cousin, Mademoiselle Ursule d'Orbeval,” added my aunt, with a shade of difference in her tone almost imperceptible, and yet sufficiently marked, to make people understand that she wished to establish a kind of distinction between myself and my friend, and one to my advantage.

M. de Lancry bowed a second time.

I cast down my eyes, and felt myself blushing deeply ; my hand was close to Ursula's and I pressed hers, but almost timidly.

“ Will Mademoiselle do me the honour of accepting me as a partner for the next country dance ? ” said M. de Lancry.

I assented, casting, as I did so, an uneasy look at Mademoiselle de Maran.

M. de Lancry bowed to me, and said, addressing himself to Ursula—

“ May I hope, mademoiselle, that you will deign to grant me the same favour for the second country dance ? ”

“ Certainly, sir,” replied Ursula with a sigh, and as she bent down her head, she cast, from under her long eye-lashes, a look of melancholy upon M. de Lancry.

At this instant, a very pretty woman, who was in one blaze of jewels, came up to us, leaning on the arm of a young English Colonel. Her complexion was extremely dark, her figure slender, her deportment most elegant ; the expression of her countenance was haughty and bold, and she had large, piercing, black eyes,

which were placed in rather close proximity to her aquiline nose.

"You quite forget your friends, M. de Lancry," she said, in a sonorous, yet sweet voice.

M. de Lancry turned quickly round, restrained a somewhat visible movement of embarrassment, and said, with a low bow—

"I do not deserve, *Madame la Duchesse*, so amiable a reproach ; I only arrived this morning from London, and I was hoping to pay you my respects to-morrow."

How unerring, my friend, are certain presentiments ; the instant I heard M. de Lancry address this Lady as *Madame la Duchesse*, I did not, for a moment, doubt that she was Madame de Richeville, whose name I had heard so indiscreetly coupled with that of M. de Lancry.

The country dance was about to begin.

"See how good-natured I am," said the Duchess, to M. de Lancry ; "I forgive you your forgetfulness, and I will even tell you in confidence, that I am not engaged for this country dance ; am I not generous enough ?"

M. de Lancry looked at her again with an air of astonishment—almost, indeed, of stupefaction, and replied with rather evident constraint.

"And am not I fortunate, almost too much so ? I might have danced this country dance with you, madame, and I am going to have the pleasure of dancing it with Mademoiselle de Maran, whom I have just had the honour of inviting."

Madame de Richeville, thinking M. de Lancry meant my aunt, and that he was joking, burst out laughing, and exclaimed—

"If you are come all the way from England, to dance with Mademoiselle de Maran, there must, certainly, be an "Eccentric club" in London, and you wish to distinguish yourself as one of its most intrepid members—is it not so ?"

M. de Lancry hastened to interrupt Madame de Richeville, who was very short sighted, and had not perceived that my aunt was present.

"I am about, he observed, to have the honour of dancing with Mademoiselle *Mathilde* de Maran," and M. de Lancry laid a certain emphasis upon the name of *Mathilde*, and bowed slightly towards me.

"Ah ! I understand ! She is already out, then !" observed the Duchess, who, raising her little tortoise-shell eye-glass, scrutinized me, with, what I fancied was, a malicious kind of curiosity. I felt upon the rack.

My aunt had not lost a word of this dialogue ; seeing the Duchess's eye-glass still directed at me, she seemed to be angry, and addressed her from her seat with a shrill and imperious voice, in these words—

"Well, *Madame la Duchesse*, don't you think my niece a charming person?"

"Charming, indeed, madame," drily replied the Duchess, as she lowered her glass; and approaching my aunt, she made her a most graceful and aristocratic half curtsy.

I have found out since, that my aunt and the Duchess detested one another, and this accounted for the attention with which every one had examined these two equally formidable adversaries.

"Well, madame," continued my aunt, "I am really delighted, for the sake of this dear little girl, that you think her so charming; the approbation of a woman like yourself, madame, can bring nothing but good luck to a young person who is just entering the world—it is a kind of omen. And yet, in spite of that, I cannot believe, madame, that my niece will ever obtain *your* perfection."

Nothing could apparently be more simple, and more polite than these words, and yet, I was well enough acquainted with the accent with which my aunt spoke them, to feel assured that they concealed some malicious meaning. And effectively, when I raised my eyes, and looked at Madame de Richeville and the persons who surrounded us, I perceived that the Duchess was affecting a calmness she did not, in reality, possess, and that every body was much embarrassed.

You, my friend, must have met Madame de Richeville in the world, and you, doubtless, are aware how she was talked about, and how that world exaggerated, in the most odious degree, the lightness of her conduct. It was said that her faults would not be tolerated but for the illustrious name she bore, the power and connections of her family, and her immense wealth; it was even asserted that her husband had been forced to separate himself from her. Nevertheless, she was always perfectly well received in the best society, to which she herself, indeed, belonged; the Dauphiness, however, on the reception days at the *château*, seemed, by her freezing manner towards the Duchess, to show how much she blamed the lady's conduct.

Now, then, you will understand all the bitterness of Mademoiselle de Maran's observation, who, taking advantage of her first success, struck a last blow at Madame de Richeville, by exclaiming—

"God bless my soul, madame, what beautiful rubies you have got there! Didn't they formerly belong to that excellent, old Dowager, Duchess de Richeville? What a pity the poor old lady was not able to see you with them on, and how delighted M. de Richeville, must be to see you wearing his mother's jewels."

In order fully to understand the cruelty of this remark of Mademoiselle de Maran's, you must know, my friend, there was a prevalent report (which, however, I afterwards found to be false) that the Duke de Richeville had given these family jewels to his wife, on her marriage, and that on his separation from the Duchess,

he had, with extreme delicacy of feeling, forbore to ask her for them back, a delicacy which she so little imitated as to continue wearing them as usual.

Everybody seemed thunderstruck at Mademoiselle de Maran's maliciousness. Madame de Richeville, however, had sufficient power over herself to conceal her resentment, and casting upon my aunt a glance of mingled sweetness and dignity, she said to her, almost affectionately—

"You are really too good, madame ; I wish I could repay the mark of interest which you are so kind as to show towards me. But—now I think of it—I can, at least, tell you a piece of news which will, I hope, cause you a lively pleasure. One of your friends is just coming back from Italy, where he has been staying for several years, without any one's knowing what had become of him. But, I see you are uneasy, and I will not tantalize your curiosity any longer. Well, then," added Madame de Richeville with a graceful and confidential look, "well, then, you must know that M. de Mortagne will be here in a few days. Yes, I have heard of him from Venice. They say the story of his disappearance is quite a terrible romance. Confess, madame, that you are quite surprised, and *much delighted at his return.*"

Madame de Richeville aimed these last words at Mademoiselle de Maran, as if they were a dagger-thrust, and then, as she heard the music prelude for the country dance, she gaily said to M. de Lancry—

"I will offer you a waltz, as a compensation for the country dance which you have refused me." And turning to the English Colonel, on whose arm she was leaning, she said to him—

"Let us go up into the little gallery ; I should like to see this country dance."

I had never before seen Mademoiselle de Maran lose her self-possession, which however, she certainly did, at the very first words uttered by Madame de Richeville. But, when the Duchess said, "M. de Mortagne will be here in a few days," my aunt turned quite pale, and appeared completely overcome, to the great surprise of those who knew her audacity, and who did not understand the hidden meaning of Madame de Richeville's reply.

The country dance now began. M. de Lancry had the good taste to spare me those compliments which are always embarrassing to a young person. He was very unaffected, and very gay ; but without the least tinge of malice ; he spoke to me of Mademoiselle de Maran with an affectionate respect, and of M. de Versac with tenderness ; he admired greatly the interesting expression of Ursula's countenance, and asked me what great sorrow it was which made her so melancholy ? He had a taste for music, and we, accordingly, conversed upon that art. I preferred the German school, while he gave his preference to the Italian, and he displayed

so much good-nature in the discussion, that at the end of the countrydance, I was scarcely afraid of him.

After he had conducted me back to my place, and reminded Ursula of the promise she had given, he went away, to pay his respects to several ladies of his acquaintance.

"Good Heavens !" observed Ursula to me, "how did you find courage enough to talk so much ? I was quite lost in admiration at you."

"Oh !" I replied, "at first I felt very nervous ; but I recovered my courage by degrees, and then M. de Lancry appears so good-natured—so unaffected—you will see yourself."

"Oh ! I am sure I shall scarcely dare to answer him," said Ursula timidly.

"You are wrong to say so ; he thinks you are an enchanting person, and told me so just now, and, perhaps, that is the reason which made me think him so agreeable."

My conversation with Ursula was interrupted by numerous male acquaintances of my aunt's who now came up to pay their respects to her. She introduced to us those among them who were of a dancing age, and I and Ursula had soon a great number of engagements.

My attention was so absorbed by the dancing that I had scarcely time, however desirous, to reflect upon Madame de Richeville's last words, about M. de Mortagne, of whom I always entertained a grateful remembrance, since he had been my first protector in my days of childhood. "For the last eight or nine years his name had scarcely ever been uttered in my aunt's house. I now first remembered that I had heard it merely said, once or twice, that he had not been heard of lately ; this, however, occasioned me no surprise, as his mode of life was so strange a one, and he was known to be such an inveterate traveller. The only thing which I thought extraordinary was the overwhelming effect which the news of his return had produced upon Mademoiselle de Maran."

I was roused from these reflections by the sound of a waltz, and among the couples borne along in the giddy whirl, I beheld M. de Lancry and the Duchess de Richeville. Her figure was perfection itself, and like him, she was a most accomplished waltzer. The long ringlets of her jet black hair floated gracefully round her head, which was a most expressive one, and was then thrown slightly backwards.

This woman must either have felt strong in her own innocence, or must have held the world's judgments in utter contempt, to have braved it so openly after Mademoiselle de Maran's cruel words, which had just, as it were, re-echoed all the real or supposed scandalous passages in Madame de Richeville's conduct. I was much surprised at the expression of M. de Lancry's features during this waltz ; he seemed by turns contemptuous, ironical, and irritated,

and when he conducted Madame de Richeville back to her place I fancied she was smiling with bitterness at some words that M. de Lancry was addressing to her in a low tone of voice.

I experienced, why, I know not, a painful sensation when I first saw M. de Lancry waltzing with Madame de Richeville. I involuntarily recalled the dialogue I had heard, and I no longer felt any doubt that she loved him. I was somewhat alarmed at her proud and resolute bearing ; but when I reflected that she was a friend of M. de Mortagne, who had been my protector, and, as Madame Blondeau afterwards had told me, so devotedly attached to my mother, I endeavoured to surmount the painful impression which she had made upon my mind. I was interrupted in these reflections by the successive country dances for which my hand was engaged.

My *satirical* disposition had already, doubtless, been heard of by several of my partners, for more than one of them, thinking to gratify my love of sarcasm, wasted a great deal of their would-be wit, in epigrams ; some praised me in a most exaggerated degree, and others made jokes which I was unable to understand.

Take them all in all, although many of them were agreeable men, still most of them seemed almost without that perfect tact which was such a remarkable characteristic of M. de Lancry. Indeed a man must possess the greatest caution and delicacy of mind, before he can put a young girl at her ease, so as to enjoy all the charms of a conversation. He must employ a modified and not too forcible language ; to praise her beauty, for instance, is, perhaps, a want of taste, while to commend her gifts of mind, even if it be flattery, is still a graceful one. A young girl's gaiety is infinitely more charming when you do not cause it to extend beyond a smile, and you are apt to alarm the exquisite and ingenious delicacy of her observations, if you reply to them by ill natured remarks on others.

Do not think me vain, my friend, if I talk to you about that age which, in us women, is the most charming of all. Our instincts are then so noble, so generous, and our illusions such radiant ones, that our very disposition, and our very thoughts, partake in the habitual elevation of our souls.

Let us return to this ball. I observed that Ursula continued to dance with the same graceful and touching melancholy. She did not appear much interested in what was going on ; she did not, however, decline a single country dance, though it was with a sigh and an appearance of self-sacrifice that she accepted her partners.

After drinking a cup of tea, and when we had given a look at the supper-room, we left the ball.

M. de Lancry, who was leaving at the same time, met with us in the waiting-room, and he went to find my aunt's servants, and brought us our pelisses.

M. de Versac gave his arm to Ursula, and M. de Lancry offered his to Mademoiselle de Maran, who said to him with a laugh—

“Be kind enough not to make me such an insulting offer, Gontran ; I am a nice figure to accept it—am I not ? Give your arm to my niece ; I can go very well alone.”

“When we got into the carriage, my aunt said to M. de Lancry—

“Now, recollect, Gontran, that as you are come back, I shall expect to see you very often with your uncle ; you know I do not choose to be neglected. By-the-bye that beautiful Duchess of yours must, assuredly, wear a mask of brass, painted rose colour ; it would take the fire of hell itself to make *her* blush ! But what *am* I talking about before these little girls ? Well, well, good night, Gontran, and look to yourself if you are not attentive to me.”

M. de Lancry assured my aunt that he would be most happy to obey her, and we returned to the *hôtel de Maran*.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE DAY AFTER THE BALL.

THERE are certain impressions as there are certain landscapes, upon which distance is required to bestow their full value. The day after the ball, when I collected together my remembrances, and recalled to mind every detail of that evening, I felt, as it were, the rebound of the sensations I had then experienced. And yet—why should I conceal it from you, my friend ? among all those memories, one predominated, and that one was the remembrance of that waltz of Weber's, in which M. de Lancry was the partner of Madame de Richeville. The air, which was a somewhat melancholy one, perpetually recurred to my thoughts, and yet, I could not remember the air of the country dance which I had danced with M. de Lancry. The result of my impressions was rather a mournful one. The world, in spite of its perfect polish—in spite of its exquisite and enchanting exterior, already appeared to me an arena where the most ghastly wounds were inflicted, while every lip was wreathed with smiles, and every brow with flowers. I was but too well convinced of this, by what had taken place between Mademoiselle de Maran and the Duchess de Richeville. The words they had interchanged were polished ones, but some cruel mystery lurked in their hidden meaning.

And yet a marked attention had been shewn me ; and I might be assured, putting false modesty out of the question, that my beauty had been remarked. I had observed that Mademoiselle de B—

and Mademoiselle de P—— had not danced more than three or four country dances, while I and Ursula had been compelled to refuse more than one partner. It was impossible for me not to catch, as I passed along, that kind of flattering murmur which is always so delightful to a woman's ear. M. de Lancry, too, beyond all comparison the most agreeable *cavalier* of that brilliant assembly, had been most assiduous in his attentions to us ; and, notwithstanding all this, the result of my impressions was a bitter and a melancholy one.

To that *fête*, however, I was indebted for one delightful thought—one vague and dreamy hope—M. de Mortagne was coming.

I looked forward to his return with joy, for I felt though confusedly, the need of serious and safe advice ; and I not only entertained a profound aversion for my aunt, but her very praises, her very counsels and remarks kept me in a state of continual uneasiness. I resembled those unhappy creatures who suspect poison in everything they lift to their lips.

I was, indeed, most warmly attached to Ursula ; but she was as young and inexperienced as myself, and though I had a firm reliance upon the devoted affection of Blondeau, that excellent woman was only able to love me blindly and without discernment.

M. d'Orbeval, my guardian, and Ursula's father, had retired to an estate he possessed in Touraine, and I now never saw him ; moreover, he, like my other relations, was completely a creature of my aunt's. It was, therefore, incumbent upon me to consider M. de Mortagne's arrival as an event most fortunate for me ; and, besides, he had promised me to return when it should be in his power to render me any real service. My anxiety was rendered still more intense, by the terror which my aunt had displayed when Madame de Richeville announced his return to her.

In the midst of these reflections I was interrupted by Ursula's coming into my room. We conversed about the ball, and I recurred to the slight feeling of jealousy she had inspired in my mind before our departure to the Ambassador's, with the greater gaiety, because I had been delighted during the whole evening to behold my cousin's success.

"Do you know, my dear Ursula," I observed to her with a smile, "that seeing me so radiant the other evening, people may, perhaps, have fancied I was delighted with myself, while on the contrary, it was of you that I was proud ! Yet, what does it signify to us—to us, who have no secrets of the heart from one another."

"What do you think of M. de Lancry ?" suddenly asked my cousin.

"Why, I think him a charming person," I replied, a little surprised at this abrupt question. "Yes, quite charming—especially

when he is not dancing with that haughty looking Duchess de Richeville."

Ursula looked at me attentively ; then dropped her eyes, and after a moment's silence, continued—

" Shall I tell you, Matilda, what I think ?"

" Pray, do so directly."

" Well, then, I fancy Mademoiselle de Maran and M. de Versac would be delighted if they could bring about a marriage between you and M. de Lancry."

My first movement was one of surprise, and then I burst into laughter.

" And what makes you think this idea such an unreasonable one, Matilda ? Did not M. de Versac present M. de Lancry to Mademoiselle de Maran ? and did not your aunt give M. de Lancry a most pressing invitation to pay her frequent morning visits ? Now, to whom is she at home in the morning ? Only to five or six of her most intimate acquaintances. Why, then, should she have made an exception in favour of M. de Versac's nephew ?"

" Shall I tell you, Ursula, what I think ?" I replied, employing my cousin's own expression. " I fancy M. de Versac and Mademoiselle de Maran would be delighted, if they could bring about a marriage between *you* and M. de Lancry."

It was now Ursula's turn to smile, and she replied—

" What nonsense ! Is so good a match possible for a poor girl, humble and portionless like myself ? No, no ; you know my wish and my intention never to marry ; I know my own merits too well to aim at what is far above all hopes of mine ; and, besides, to-morrow, if it were in my power to marry M. de Lancry, I would refuse him. Does this surprise you ? It is the truth, nevertheless. He is too handsome—too elegant—too fashionable. It is not that species of happiness I should seek for ; I am not adapted for so brilliant a position ; my life must pass in obscurity, and I must aspire to no other felicity than to that of seeing *you* happy."

" We shall never agree in our opinions of the part which you profess it to be your lot to fulfil—you shall see, my dear Ursula. If I may believe my own heart, you will be happy on your own account also. But to return to M. de Lancry, why will you have it that *the dangerous advantages* of which he is the possessor, find more favour in my eyes, than in your own ?"

" As regards me, because in marrying me, M. de Lancry would, as it were, marry beneath himself, while you, who possess yourself, those very same dangerous advantages, as you call them, could not but be—as indeed you ought—delighted with the consequences of such a marriage."

" Ursula, you are raving ; M. de Lancry thinks no more of me, than I do of him ; and, moreover, like yourself, I should prefer a

less brilliant lot, and one in which, from that very cause, I should be more secure of happiness.

"But still you think M. de Lancry a charming person?"

"Good Heaven! Ursula, how provoking you are. Well, then, yes, I do think him so; at least as charming as one can think any one whom one has seen for a couple of hours."

"Just as you like; but you think him *especially charming when he is not waltzing with the Duchess de Richeville.*"

I could not help blushing. "Yes," was my reply to my cousin; "but I am sure I do not know why, nor why I blush at hearing you repeat those words of mine."

"Why—why—shall I tell you why?" answered my cousin, and her manner was a melancholy one while she spoke. "It is because you will love him."

"You are raving again, Ursula."

"No, no, Matilda; I am not raving; my friendship for you—my fear of seeing myself forgotten by you—the jealousy of my affection if you choose, all these feelings, supply the place to me of that experience which it is impossible I should possess, and enlighten me more, perhaps, even than yourself, as to the nature of your feelings. Forgive me, Matilda—forgive me these tears; I ought to have anticipated this change in your life, which, sooner or later, was destined to take place."

And my cousin threw herself into my arms, weeping passionately.

I cannot tell you, my friend, with what profound emotion I replied to this proof of Ursula's affection, and I attempted to console her by the warmest protestations of my attachment.

"Now," I said to her, while I wiped away my tears, "I require nothing more to make me detest M. de Lancry—I swear to you—"

"Silence, Matilda," interrupted Ursula, while she gently placed her hand upon my mouth, "silence—it was folly—madness—in me to give way to my first impulse; but I could not help it; my poor heart was so full that it overflowed, and besides, I cannot conceal from you how deeply my feelings are interested in you, and in all that concerns you."

Our conversation was broken off by Blondeau, who exclaimed, as she came into the room—

"Oh! mademoiselle, there is such a pretty carriage just come! The court yard of our *hôtel* has never seen such a one before, I am sure. And such a charming young man alighted from it! He enquired for Mademoiselle de Maran, and on the steps he met M. Bisson, who has certainly been breaking something again; for he was going very fast, without his hat, and looking quite bewildered."

Ursula looked at me, and I understood her. This young man,

of whom my governess was speaking, could be no other than M. de Lancery.

I was annoyed at his calling so soon ; it appeared to me to be a want of tact on his part, and I made up my mind to decline going down stairs, should Mademoiselle de Maran send for me, under any pretext.

We heard the wheels of a carriage ; Blondeau ran to the window and exclaimed—

“ Ah ! there goes the young man ; he has paid but a short visit ! ”

I felt greatly relieved, and almost regretted not having had an opportunity of refusing to go down to Mademoiselle de Maran.

Just before dinner we joined my aunt, in the drawing-room ; she was alone, and appeared to be extremely irritated.

“ Well,” she said to us, “ you have not heard of that abominable break-all M. Bisson’s last performance ! But, thank God, he will never set foot here again.”

“ What ! has M. Bisson broken any thing more, aunt ? ”

“ Broken, indeed ! ” exclaimed my aunt in a greater passion than before. “ I believe you, he *has* broken something ; it is all the fault of that fool, Servien. I had told him once for all, never to let that horrid man into my drawing-room. I was writing a letter in my cabinet with the door just a-jar, when all of a sudden, I heard a kind of harsh creaking noise like a rattle ; having no idea what it could be, I got up and went into the drawing-room, and what, do you think, I saw ? Why, that villanous M. Bisson, sitting in my arm-chair, with my clock between his knees, and twiddling about inside its works with my scissors ; he had already managed to break the main-spring, and that was the noise like a rattle which I had heard.”

“ Mademoiselle de Maran was in too great a passion to see our smothered laughter, and she continued—

“ Upon my word, I would have thrashed him if I had been strong enough. ‘ You have made up your mind, then, you abominable fellow,’ said I to him, ‘ to break everything in the house, and never to keep quiet ? ’ ” “ And pray, what would you have me do, while I am waiting for you ? I cannot bear to sit idle,” he replied so abruptly, and so coolly, while he was putting the clock upon the floor, that upon my soul, I could not stand it any longer. I lost all command of myself ; I pushed him—I ordered him out of the house, and he ran away as if the devil were behind him.”

“ Without his hat, which is on that chair,” I said to my aunt.

“ So much the better ! ” she exclaimed, “ I only wish he would catch some nice little brain fever, and then they would shut him

up for a raving madman, which he is, notwithstanding all his science."

Mademoiselle de Maran must have been mightily incensed ; for she even rejected, impatiently, the caresses of the venerable Felix, who slunk back into his kennel with a growl.

The sight of Felix recalled to my mind the valour of M. de Mortagne, which I had so much admired in my childhood, when he was bold enough to kick that horrid animal, and I mustered up courage to ask Mademoiselle de Maran, where M. de Mortagne was, and if he were likely to arrive shortly ?

Could my aunt have withered me, by the lightning of a look, I believe she would have done it.

"What is that to you ? Why do you ask me that question ? Do you think I trouble myself about that man's doings ? Thank God, whatever that beautiful Duchess, whose soul is as black as hell, may say, it may suffice you to know that *he cannot be in a better place than where he is*, and, do you hear, *he will stop there a long time*, the horrid Jacobin."

I underline these words, my friend, because in spite of myself I shuddered at the sinister, almost ferocious expression with which my aunt pronounced them ; and I immediately remembered that ten years ago, and almost in the same place, she had cast a look of implacable rage at M. de Mortagne, as she broke, in her silent fury, the needle she was holding in her hand. I was too terrified to reply a single syllable to Mademoiselle de Maran, who, after a few minutes' silence, continued—

"Gontran came to offer me the opera box of the Gentlemen of the Chamber, for to-morrow night, which I accepted, and we will, accordingly go."

I thought I would act heroically, and convince Ursula of my friendship, by declining this opportunity of again meeting M. de Lancry, and I accordingly replied—

"I am so fatigued, aunt, after the ball, that I should prefer not going to the Opera."

"You will prefer what I order you to prefer," was Mademoiselle de Maran's answer.

Ursula cast a look of entreaty at me, and I replied to my aunt—

"I will go to the Opera if you absolutely desire it."

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE OPERA.

WHEN alone, I reflected deeply upon what Ursula had said to me respecting the possibility of a marriage between myself and M. de Lancry.

Had it not been for my cousin's remarks, I might, perchance, have been a long time without analyzing in my own mind, the impression which had been made upon me by the nephew of M. de Versac. But now I questioned myself with frankness, putting, however, out of the question, the favourable influence that is invariably produced by the union, in one man, of extreme distinction of manners, an honourable name, and a remarkably handsome person. I asked myself whether the remembrance of M. de Lancry disturbed me, and whether I felt any interest in him. I fancied that I was completely indifferent to him, and I was only surprised that I should have felt any annoyance at seeing him dance with Madame de Richeville. The more inexplicable this feeling of mine was, the more obstinately did I endeavour to explain it, and I at last succeeded, thanks to Ursula's remark, which had put me upon the right track.

I have always thought that women have often no fixity of character till after they have been in love. When the first impressions, or, if I may so call them, the first interests of love are at stake ; when they are once excited, awakened, and developed, they raise to a pitch of exaltation, certain noble, or, dangerous faculties of the soul, which, by degrees, bring all the others into subjection.

For instance, at seventeen, I had no predominant quality, good or bad, and I believe it would have been difficult to form any particular and precise idea of my disposition. I was, by turns, excessively humble and excessively haughty, because in my youth I had been, by turns, ridiculously flattered, or insultingly depreciated ; I was pious from conviction and nature, and felt an imperative obligation to thank God for every happiness that fell to my lot ; but I first pushed this feeling, which was a praiseworthy one in itself, to a blameable degree of childishness, and afterwards to an exaggerated sentiment of gratitude, which bordered upon impiety. I was generous, as far as it lay in my power ; but to my shame, I own that I never felt more compassion towards the

wretched, than when I was myself a sufferer, and I was then eagerly attracted to the misfortunes of others, in order to attempt, at least, to console them.

Happiness, without rendering me selfish, nevertheless, completely absorbed me, and it was necessary to arouse my pity, before I could be brought to sympathise with affliction.

My sentiments, whether of affection or of aversion, were less violent than durable ; I might, and did, forgive a wrong, an offence ; but I did not forget it, not that I ever sought to injure the enemy who had injured me, but I avenged myself, *for my own private satisfaction*, by a secret and internal contempt.

My disposition, then, as you may perceive, my friend, had nothing about it very marked or very decided.

Well, then, from the day when I saw M. de Lancry for the first time, a passion, to which I was hitherto a complete stranger, began to dawn in my breast—a passion, which, at first, was scarcely to be perceived—scarcely to be recognised, since its only manifestation was a vague feeling of displeasure at seeing a man whom I scarcely knew, waltz with a woman whom I did not know at all.

Alas ! my friend, I need not tell it to you, that passion, which was destined, at a future day, to set loose every other, and to become almost the master movement of my disposition—that passion was *jealousy*—jealousy, sometimes checked, concealed, and disavowed, by pride—sometimes, acknowledged, frantic, humble, and suppliant, even to meanness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Accustomed, from my childhood, to reflect much, and to fall back upon my own resources, endowed with a tolerably lively disposition, and a mind of some penetration, I was not long in answering the question which my cousin had addressed to me.

Why had it been more disagreeable to me, to see M. de Lancry dancing with Madame de Richeville, than with any other partner ?

And yet, I assure you again, my friend, although I thought M. de Lancry a most agreeable person, I yet experienced no feeling which I could fancy was at all akin to love, and to those first emotions of the heart, which our day dreams always represent as so sweet and so gentle. Moreover, I considered that it would be, perhaps, necessary for me to wrestle, with all my strength, against such a feeling, should I ever detect its existence, for it might render me the most miserable of women, since either M. de Lancry might not share it, or even if he did, it might displease his family or my own.

Amidst all these serious reflections, which were such weighty ones for a poor girl of seventeen, I missed, more than all, the presence of my only friend, M. de Mortagne, in whom I had a kind of instinctive confidence. Unfortunately Mademoiselle de Maran's last words had banished the hopes which Madame de Richeville had

awakened in me, when she announced the speedy return of my old protector.

You will conceive, my friend, that once carried away by the course of these reflections, once determined to watch, with jealousy, the least movements of my own heart, I awaited, with a kind of anxiety, this evening on which I should, doubtless, see M. de Lancry, for the second time.

It was rather late when we arrived at the Opera ; the house was quite full, and the audience was a brilliant one ; the Duchess de Berry was present on that evening.

The Opera was the *Siege of Corinth*.

On entering our box, the first person I saw, almost opposite to us, was the Duchess of Richeville, accompanied by Madame de Mirecourt, one of my aunt's friends, and M. de Mirecourt.

Nothing could be more elegant and beautiful than Madame de Richeville. She wore a turban of white gauze, set off with thin plates of silver, which suited admirably her somewhat dark complexion, and her jet black hair ; her dress was of cherry-coloured velvet, with short sleeves, and in spite of the long gloves, you might form an idea of the perfect symmetry of her arms. She carried in her hand an enormous *bouquet* of white roses, which are said to be the greatest rarity you can procure in winter.

I used every endeavour to feel indifferent, at least, to her beauty, yet I could not divest myself of a melancholy sensation, and my thoughts of sadness were, if I may say so, accompanied by the melancholy air of that waltz of Weber's, which she had danced with M. de Lancry.

Madame de Mirecourt turned towards Madame de Richeville, who was extremely short-sighted, in order, no doubt, to point out our arrival to the Duchess.

Madame de Richeville hastily raised her opera-glass, and examined me with much attention ; but not with that affectation of haughtiness and displeasure, which had so struck me on the night of the ball.

The curtain was now raised, and I was so fond of music, and so delighted with the Opera, that I listened to, and looked at everything with the eagerness of a school-girl.

During the *entr'acte*, I perceived M. de Lancry make his appearance in the Duchess de Berry's box, which the Princess had not left to enter her *salon*.

Madame appeared to receive M. de Lancry with the utmost affability, and conversed, for some time, with him ; she even deigned to detain him for a few moments longer, when he was about to retire, doubtless, from a feeling of discretion.

When he quitted the royal box, I felt curious to see whether he would pay us a visit before he went to pay his respects to the Duchess de Richeville.

For some minutes this curiosity amounted almost to anguish in

its intensity ; my heart beat violently when I heard the door of our box open, and I felt assured that it was M. de Lancry.

I was not mistaken.

I felt agitated, and did not dare to turn my head round, while he was addressing Mademoiselle de Maran and Ursula.

My aunt gently touched my arm, and said—

“ Matilda !—M. de Lancry.”

I turned round and bowed, blushing while I did so.

By degrees I felt my embarrassment diminish, and I began to take a share in the conversation.

M. de Lancry was extremely agreeable, and extremely witty ; he knew all Paris, and all Paris was present that evening. I can remember every particular of that conversation ; for, during its progress, M. de Lancry appeared to me in quite a new light, and in one which was most advantageous to him.

“ Come, Gontran,” said my aunt, to M. de Lancry, “ you who go everywhere, and know every body, just put me up a little to the history of all these fine people, who are strangers to me. I know as little about them as these two young girls do ; for it is two years, and more, since I set foot in the Opera house ; I suppose all the cream of the financial circles is present here, and you must know something, either by name or sight, of that sort of people. They are rich enough to frighten respectable persons out of their wits, and they always hire a box at the Opera, while poor wretches, like us, are obliged to content ourselves modestly with the boxes belonging to the Court, which, however, thank God, are the best.”

“ I should be much puzzled, madame, to comply with your request,” answered M. de Lancry, “ for, during the four months I was absent in England, many of these *financial* boxes, as you call them, have changed masters. I scarcely see a person I know, so capricious is the *Bourse*, and so many fortunes are suddenly made and unmade, by its fluctuations.

“ It would be a pretty job, indeed,” replied Mademoiselle de Maran, “ if all those sort of people were to continue rich to the end of the chapter, and a nice example for other malefactors. But who can that little woman, with the rose-coloured *béret*, in the second row of boxes, be ? Is she not pretty ?”

“ Very pretty,” answered M. de Lancry. “ She and her husband are the heroine and hero of a very simple, but a very touching story,” added Gontran, with an expression of melancholy, which astonished me, and which lent a fresh charm to his countenance.

“ God bless my soul ! tell us all about it, Gontran. What’s the name of your fine heroine ?”

“ Their name has nothing very heroical about it,” replied M. de Lancry with a smile. “ That couple is a M. and Madame Duval.”

“ Duval ! Why, that is a very distinguished name ! And it is

quite as good as *Duparc, Dupont, Dumont, or Dupré* ! Come, Gontran, let us hear the romance of M. and Madame Duval."

"You must know, then, madame, that, two years ago"—but suddenly interrupting himself, M. de Lancry said to my aunt—"Upon my word, madame, I am quite put out by your satirical smile ; allow me to address my words to Mademoiselle Mathilde and Mademoiselle Ursule ; they will not discourage me, and will, I am certain, take an interest in this simple tale."

I looked up, and could not help blushing when I met the glance of M. de Lancry.

"Well, well," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "tell your story to these young ladies, if you like ; I won't look at you ; and if I *do* laugh, it shall be in my sleeve."

"Well, then, mademoiselle," said M. de Lancry to me, "M. and Madame Duval had made a very happy marriage—"

"Capital !" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran ; "it begins just like a story in the *Ami des Enfants*, or like one of *Berquin's*. Who would ever expect a former Captain of hussars to tell us, such pretty stories ? Go on—go on—there's the beautiful Princess Ksernika just coming into her box, with her *suite*. You will have time to finish your history before her smelling-bottle carrier, her opera-glass bearer, her fan carrier, her *bouquet* bearer, and her play-bill carrier have discharged their important functions. *Berquin's* tales are not much to the taste of that fine Princess."

"I am aware, madame," replied M. de Lancry with a malicious smile, "of the great difference which exists between a tale of *Berquin's* and the Princess Ksernika ; but it is to these young ladies that I address myself ; I have no need to ask their forgiveness, for the unaffected simplicity of my story, and, therefore, I shall go on."

"M. and Madame Duval were perfectly happy, and in the enjoyment of a competent income. They were, however, completely ruined by some bankruptcy, or abuse of confidence ; I forget which. M. Duval had an old mother, to whom he was devotedly attached, and who was blind ; she had given up all her property to him, on the understanding that she was to reside with him and her daughter-in-law, of whom she was very fond. When ruin stared them in the face, the first and the greatest grief of M. and Madame Duval was their fear of poverty falling upon their old mother, who had been so long accustomed to all the comforts that are almost indispensable at her age. They determined, therefore, to conceal their misfortune from her, and they derived great assistance in this project from her infirmities. They found means to supply the expenses that were at first required from the wreck of their fortune. Duval had a perfect knowledge of English and German, and he employed himself in translations, while his wife, who painted exquisitely, executed designs for albums, and even for fans. By incessant labour, privations, and especially presence of mind and

adroitness, they contrived, for nearly two years, to deceive their mother, who, perceiving no material change in her usual mode of living, did not, for an instant, suspect the misfortune which had befallen her children, a misfortune which would have been doubly fatal to her, both from the sorrow which she would naturally have experienced, and from the privations which she would have insisted upon submitting to in consequence. However, a few days ago, M. Duval received a hundred thousand francs, with a letter which informed him, that the sum enclosed was a restitution from the bankrupt who had ruined him. Others, however, attribute this gift to some mysterious benefactor."

"Which seems much more probable, than the repentance of a swindler," observed my aunt.

"Be that as it may, mademoiselle, thanks to that sum of money, this good and worthy young couple, accustomed, as they now are, to labour, have almost regained the competency they had lost, and their old mother has never found out how nearly she was wrecked on the breakers of want."

"The end of the story is worthy of its beginning," said Mademoiselle de Maran; "and it proves that virtue always meets with a reward. We may tell, from this, that when the beautiful Princess Ksernika makes her appearance at the last judgment, she will not be kept long in suspense."

"You may laugh, madame," continued M. de Lancry, "but I will, nevertheless, maintain that this anecdote does the highest credit to the days we live in."

And turning to me, he added—

"Do you not think, mademoiselle, that such conduct as this, exhibits a rare delicacy of feeling? What self-command, in repressing every murmur, every involuntary allusion to a misfortune from which one suffers so much, and which one conceals with such a pious anxiety! What presence of mind—what strength of heart, to maintain, amidst the piercing anxieties of poverty, that evenness and cheerfulness of disposition which is bestowed by the habitual possession of wealth! Is it not, in a word, a noble and a touching picture—these two young people, piously deceiving an aged mother, by creating, from their own labour, one little nook of opulence for her, in the midst of their own cold poverty?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Ursula, with emotion in her voice, and putting her hand to her eyes, "it is noble—it is admirable! When one hears of such deeds as this, one no longer regrets being poor, since poverty inspires such devotion of self to others."

I was so much moved, that I could not utter a word, and I envied Ursula, who had been able to speak thus.

M. de Lancry had related this tale with a finished gracefulness of manner, and the story, though a simple one enough, acquired a charm when told by such a man. Several times during the narrative I had looked at M. de Lancry, the touching expression of whose

countenance lent fresh attraction to his words, and in my opinion then, no one could so generously appreciate such an action, without being capable of imitating it himself.

I was silent with astonishment ; for I did not expect to find such gentle sensibility beneath the brilliant exterior of a man of the world, and I felt deeply pained when I heard my aunt say to M. de Lancry—

“ My niece, Matilda, in spite of her sanctified looks, is so malicious, that she is quite capable, my poor Gontran, of laughing in her sleeve, at least, at your story.”

I raised my eyes quickly to M. de Lancry's countenance, in order, as it were, to re-assure him ; his glance met mine ; but it was one of such melancholy and discouragement, that I was on the point of crying, from sorrow and vexation.

I do not know how this scene would have terminated, had it not been for the arrival of M. de Versac, who came in, a few minutes before the curtain was raised.

I felt a deep emotion—a kind of confusion of ideas which was increased still more by the effect of the music ; every thought which agitated me, was, as it were, accompanied by a kind of melody, in turns dreamy, tender, or passionate, and which was but too much in accordance with my state of heart.

Under certain circumstances, music is, undoubtedly, seductive, and seems to translate our most secret, our most confused, and sometimes even our most guilty thoughts, into a language so intoxicating, that we abandon ourselves at once to its dangerous influences.

Thus, without giving an instant's reflection to the obstacles, which that feeling might encounter that was now awakening within me so deliciously, and gently rocked by that adorable melody, I delighted to recal to my mind M. de Lancry's touching words, and I suffered myself to be carried away by my admiration for the disposition which I supposed him to possess. I was even assailed by some ideas of jealousy, when, through the phantasmagoria of that waking dream, I saw vaguely before me, the dark countenance of the Duchess de Richeville.

When the act had finished, I still continued to listen, and so absorbed had I become, that my aunt was compelled to call me several times, before she could arouse me from my revery.

The performances were over, and we left our box. M. de Versac gave me his arm, while M. de Lancry offered his to Ursula. I went down the stairs almost mechanically, scarcely hearing or seeing anything that was passing near me.

Just as our carriage was announced, I became conscious of a most delicious, but most powerful perfume close to me ; something touched my dress slightly, as it brushed by, and a voice, full of emotion, almost whispered in my ear, with an affectionate tone, these words—





Fig. 1. en. 14. Toward

"Poor child, beware ; they want you to marry ; wait till M. de Mortagne returns."

I turned quickly round, to see who had addressed me ; but I only perceived the cherry-coloured satin cloak, and the gauze and silver turban of the Duchess de Richeville, who, with a light step, and accompanied by M. and Madame de Mirecourt, was going down the stairs before me.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### CONFESSION OF LOVE.

A MONTH had elapsed since my visit to the Opera with my aunt and M. de Lancry. Gontran had been very regular in his visits to Mademoiselle de Maran, which had taken place first at intervals of two or three days, but had become latterly of daily recurrence.

As our intimacy increased, I discovered a thousand fresh charming qualities in him ; it was impossible to meet with a man of more even disposition, more engaging manners, or of greater delicacy in the attentions which he paid. His acuteness and ingenuity were such, and he flattered with such subtilty, that he succeeded in dressing his adulation in the garb of truth, even with me—with me who was always distrustful of praises, which reminded me of my aunt's treacherous exaggerations on the score of the merits with which I was endowed.

M. de Lancry warmly supported every noble and deserving cause with an ardour and generosity peculiarly his own, and his excessive modesty was visibly pained when any allusion was made, in his presence, to those brilliant qualities which had obtained for him distinctions so rare at his age. Though, from motives of propriety, but little was said in the presence of myself and Ursula, respecting his successes in society, it was, nevertheless, easy to perceive that M. de Lancry had no tinge of coxcombry about him, and the style of his conversation was, when he pleased, if not serious, at least instructive. He had travelled much, and with advantage, spoke with infinite taste upon the fine arts, and, was acquainted, by no means superficially, with the contemporary literature of various countries.

My long description of his qualities, is sufficient information to you that I loved him—yes—I *did* love him.

How was it possible for me not to have done so ? Living with my aunt, an almost solitary life, seeing none but him, and seeing him every day, could I long resist the fascinations which rendered

him so seductive ? I have told you how gloomy and monotonous was my existence at Mademoiselle de Maran's. When M. de Lancry was admitted into our intimacy, everything was changed ; the hope, the delight, of seeing him, the intense wish to please him ; the as intense dread of not succeeding, the thousand remembrances which followed his absence, the protracted reveries ; in a word, the numberless mysterious anxieties of passion ; all conspired to throw me into a state of unceasing emotion, and hour after hour flew by upon wings of lightning.

I loved him—and that love rendered me, in turns, very happy and very miserable. I was happy at those rare intervals when I felt confidence in myself, in the days of my pride—pride of youth, pride of beauty, pride of heart—when I asked myself whether Gontran could find in another such securities of happiness as I believed I possessed, and could offer him if he sought my hand ?

I was miserable—oh ! very miserable—when, doubtful of myself, of my beauty, almost of my heart ; I dared not believe that Gontran could love me, and even persuaded myself that he was more tenderly attached than ever to Madame de Richeville. Then those words she had spoken to me so affectionately at the Opera—those words, “ Poor child, beware ! ” would recur to my mind. In my discouragement, I had no longer energy enough to detest that woman, and I interpreted those words of hers, as if she had said, “ Poor child, beware ; they want you to marry Gontran ; but you possess not one quality to please him, and you will suffer in an affection that is unshared.”

When, on the other hand, my self-confidence returned, I looked upon those words of the Duchess as a kind of disguised threat—a species of *veto* upon my pretensions to a heart of which she was the possessor.

These different reflections were the more oppressive to me, from my having no one to whom I could confide them. My guardian had sent for Ursula to spend some time with him. Our parting, though not intended to be of long duration, had not been the less painful, and at this time, especially, I suffered doubly, from my cousin's absence.

In the midst, however, of my most harrowing doubts, I consoled myself sometimes, by thinking that Mademoiselle de Maran would not have admitted M. de Lancry in so open and so marked a manner, if he had not acquainted her with his intentions. Still neither my aunt nor M. de Versac had ever made the slightest allusion to the possibility of a marriage between myself and M. de Lancry.

At last an end was put to these anxieties. On the 15th of February—I remember the day, the date, and the circumstances, as if it had been but yesterday—on the 15th of February, I was

alone in my aunt's drawing-room, where I had gone expecting to find her ; but she had gone out, leaving directions to say, in case any visitors should call, that she would be back directly. I was reading the "*Méditations*" of Lamartine, when I heard the drawing-room door open, and Servien announced the Viscount de Lancry.

I had never before been alone with Gontran, and I felt fearfully embarrassed.

"They told me, mademoiselle, that your aunt would soon be back, and that she had requested any visitors would be good enough to wait for her." And then, after an instant's hesitation, he added, with much emotion in his voice—"I did not expect the happiness of finding you here, mademoiselle ; permit me, therefore, to profit by this rare and precious opportunity, in order to entreat that you will hear what I have to say."

"Sir—I really do not know—what can you have to say to me ?"—I stammered out, while my poor heart beat to a degree that was almost painful.

Then with a voice, the charm of whose trembling accents I shall never forget, he said to me—

"Now, mademoiselle, allow me to speak to you with the utmost frankness, and be kind enough to promise me an equal frankness, in return."

"I promise it you, sir."

"Well, then, mademoiselle, my uncle, M. de Versac, making an unwarrantable use of a secret, which his penetration may have discovered, but which I never confided to him, had made up his mind to ask your hand in marriage, for me, from Mademoiselle de Maran. I have implored him to do nothing of the sort."

My courage failed me—a violent shock was given to my heart, and fancying M. de Lancry entertained an aversion for me, I replied, in a feeble voice—

"It was useless to tell me this, sir——"

I could not finish the sentence.

"No, mademoiselle—permit me to assure you, it was not useless ; I could not authorise M. de Versac to make such a demand to your aunt, before I had obtained your own consent."

"And you have come, then, to ask me for my consent !" I exclaimed, without the thought or the power of concealing my delight.

A movement of surprise, made by M. de Lancry, caused me almost to regret my frankness ; I dreaded lest he should place an unfavourable interpretation upon it ; I blushed, grew troubled, and could not add another word.

After a few minutes' silence, Gontran continued—

"Yes, mademoiselle, I have come to solicit your consent, but without the hope of obtaining it. Your choice must be an un-

biased one, and I should have ever regretted having been the occasion of any request or molestation, which might have been annoying to you."

"Sir, I—"

Gontran interrupted me, and said tenderly, indeed ; but, yet, with seriousness—

"One word more, mademoiselle, before I am doomed to see, not, indeed, any presumptuous hopes, but the wishes which I have scarcely dared to form, overthrown by your refusal. Allow me to tell you all my thoughts. You are an orphan ; you are almost without a tie in the world, and, as a man of honour, it is my duty to use as serious language to yourself as I would to your mother. You know why, on this occasion, I address myself to *you*, and not to Mademoiselle de Maran," added Gontran, with a significant look, which proved to me that he was aware of my situation, with respect to my aunt, though he could not, from motives of delicacy, openly allude to it.

I was deeply touched by the manner, at once serious and affectionate, in which Gontran expressed himself, and I answered—

"I understand, and I thank you."

"When," he continued, "you have heard me out, you will be able, mademoiselle, to form as accurate a judgment of the future as if it were already accomplished. My good qualities may be few, perhaps ; but I have been always honest and sincere in the performance of a promise. It has ever been my firm resolution, never to marry any woman, unless I felt a love for her as respectful in its nature, as intense in its ardour—a love whose purity and fervour would no more resemble the inconstant fancies of one's first youth, than would the transitory connections, to which such fancies lead, resemble the permanent duration of the marriage tie. Unlike the world in general, I could imagine nothing more romantic than a tender and well assorted tie, such as I pictured to myself. To realize such a dream, would only require the knowledge how to use, with discretion, those treasures of happiness which may be made to finish only with our own existence. Then, indeed, we may pass with delight, hand in hand, and with mutual confidence, through a life of tenderness and love, the very joys of which may be deliciously varied by the heart's inventive genius. For once more, I repeat it, there is nothing more romantic than marriage, when it is accompanied by love."

I know not why, at that instant, a thought of Madame de Richeville flashed through my mind, and I could not help saying to M. de Lancry—

"Yet, sir, those transitory connections to which you have alluded, appear, sometimes—"

"Ah ! mademoiselle !" he exclaimed, interrupting me, "can they

ever bear a comparison with lawful and true happiness? Ah! believe me, when we love for life, we quickly discover the nothingness of those culpable attachments. What charm can they possess, that we should prefer them to an affection consecrated by God himself? Because a woman belongs to you, in the sight of Heaven and man, are all the delights of a long evening, spent in her society, to be less appreciated? Is her preference to be less valued, because one has shown, day by day, and before all eyes, that one has deserved that preference by devotion and tenderness? Is her wit, her gracefulness, the admiration which she inspires, to be less dear to you, because her speaking glance can meet your own without fear, and because that glance can say, "Enjoy my triumphs, triumphs inspired by my love for you." If, in the midst of society, she acknowledges some sign you make her, by a sweet and mysterious smile, will that smile be less sweet, because it does not betray a guilty collusion? Are the flowers she wears less brilliant in their colours, less delicious in their perfume, because they have been selected for her by some friendly and respected hand? If one longs to travel and to repose from the tumult of the capital, in the contemplation of nature's beauties, is it absolutely necessary to rob some father of his daughter, some husband of his wife, in order to enjoy the thousand charms of a journey of love, through some land of enchantment and of poetry? Are the glorious skies, then, of Spain or Italy always gloomy to those whose mutual love need never blush? Oh! believe me, I assure you again, there are inexhaustible treasures of pure happiness and of romantic delights, in a union based upon love, such as I picture it. For, I confess to you, it would be impossible for me to look upon marriage as a solitude peopled but by two beings, as a life of indifference, or even of cold and polished decorum. Oh! no—no—it is a life in which I should wish to concentrate all the joys, all the adorations, all the energies of my heart! Believe me, now—now, that I can appreciate all the false pleasures of youth, they seem to me as far removed from true happiness, as superstition is from true religion. I know not, mademoiselle, if you have well understood me—I know not if I have succeeded in impressing you with even a feeble idea of my thoughts and of my sentiments. Were I happy enough to have done so, if, contrary to all hopes, you would permit me to authorise the application which M. de Versac desires to make to Mademoiselle de Maran on my account, believe me, mademoiselle—believe me, as a man of honour, that if beloved by you, I would be worthy of you in everything."

As he said these last words, M. de Lancry, who had been sitting in an arm chair, near the one which I occupied, rose with a motion of touching seriousness—almost of solemnity.

I cannot tell you, my friend, all the emotions which a language so new to my ears awakened in my heart; a fresh and radiant

horizon seemed to open before my vision, and I was seized with a delicious surprise ; for, the words which Gontran had uttered, about all the romance that existed in a tie of legitimate happiness, translated, as it were, and thoroughly summed up a thousand thoughts which had fledted vaguely hitherto and confusedly through my own mind.

That enchanting picture of *love in marriage*, with all the delicacies, all the mysteries, and all the transports of passion, filled my heart with hope unspeakable. I was too intensely happy to conceal my delight, or to use the slightest dissimulation in my answer. I felt my cheeks glow, and my heart beat—not, however, with timidity ; but with a generous resolution. I hoped to elevate myself as high as the man who had just addressed me with so much sincerity, and whose words inspired me with such invincible confidence.

“ I will be neither less frank, nor less sincere than yourself,” I replied. “ I am an orphan, and I am responsible to God alone, for the choice which I can, and which I choose to make. I have faith in the love which you paint in such sweet and glowing hues, because I myself have often, very often, dreamed of such a future.”

“ Can it be possible, mademoiselle—can I venture to hope ?”

“ I have promised you to be frank, and I will be so. Before I give you, not a mere hope, but an absolute certainty, permit me, in my turn, to say a few words about my own feelings ; and do not look upon what I am about to say as if it were the expression of any doubt on my part—a doubt, than which, nothing can be farther from my thoughts. I love my cousin like the tenderest of sisters. She has no fortune—she wishes to consult her heart in marrying, and in order to prevent questions of mere worldly interests from interfering with her choice, I am desirous of securing half my own fortune to her. If she remains single, I wish her always to continue with me. Will you, too, look upon her as a sister ?”

Gontran at first gazed at me with astonishment ; then, clasping his hands, he exclaimed—

“ What a noble heart !—what a soul ! Who would not approve, approve, did I say ? who would not admire so generous an affection ? Would not such conduct be a security for her elevation of character, even were it possible to doubt it before ? Besides, do I not know mademoiselle Ursule ?—do I not know she is deserving of such devoted attachment !”

“ Oh ! enough, enough,” I exclaimed with unconquerable emotion. “ I can see my heart finds an echo in your own. And now, one question,” I added, casting down my eyes and hesitating—“ The Duchess de Richeville ?”

I could not add another word.

Gontran replied immediately—

"I understand you, mademoiselle ; the world's rumours have reached your ears. Since my return from England, or rather since the ball at the Austrian Embassy, I swear to you, upon my honour, I have only been occupied with one thought—I dare not say—with only one person."

I extended my hand to Gontran, and could not restrain two tears (oh ! what sweet ones) while I said—

"If you wish for the orphan's hand, it is yours. In the presence of God I give it you."

"And," replied Gontran, "in the presence of that God, I swear to deserve it." And he fell on his knees so gracefully—so naturally—I could almost say, so piously, lifting, as he did so, my hand to his lips, that I saw nothing theatrical in the movement. Never, in my life, did I experience such a feeling of blended sweetness, serenity, and triumph.

Clasping my hands with force, I murmured in a voice of profound emotion—

"My God—my God !" how I thank thee for the future charms and flowers which will strew my path of life !"

The noise of a carriage, in the Court yard, announced the return of Mademoiselle de Maran.

"Matilda," said Gontran to me, "will you permit me to propose for you, to your aunt, now—this minute—here—and in your presence ? Then, I may be able, perhaps, to come back, and spend the evening with you."

"Oh ! yes, yes !" I exclaimed with joy, "you are right—and then you will come back this evening !"

Mademoiselle de Maran now made her appearance in the drawing-room.

"I'll lay a wager," she said to me, speaking from the drawing-room door, "that you don't know what Ursula has been about, in Touraine."

"No, madame."

"And you, Gontran ?"

"I have not an idea."

"Well, then, I do know ; I have just been to M. d'Orbeval's notary (who is also my own) and he was up to his eyes in papers—and guess what those papers were. I'll defy you to do it."

"But, aunt—"

"Those papers were settlements and deeds of gift, for Ursula," continued Mademoiselle de Maran, bursting out into one of her loudest laughs, "for Ursula, who is going to be married."

"Ursula going to be married—and without writing me word ! She did not allude to it in her last letter !" I exclaimed, painfully astonished.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute—Pierron just now, when he opened the door, gave me some letters, which I put into my bag,

without looking at them, and there is one, perhaps, for you, from Ursula."

Mademoiselle de Maran felt in her bag, took out three letters, read the addressees, and said, "Just so, there is one for you, with the Tours post-mark."

"Madame," said M. de Lancry, to my aunt, "the subject on which I am about to take the liberty of addressing you is a very serious one, and I am, doubtless, breaking through the common usages of society, in thus entering upon such a subject without preparation; but I feel so happy, and especially so eager to enjoy, as soon as possible, the privilege which will, perhaps, be granted to me, that I take this opportunity of asking you for Mademoiselle Matilde's hand in marriage, having already obtained her own consent."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed my aunt! what are you talking about, Gontran? It has fallen upon me like a thunderbolt; I am quite overcome. Who ever heard of a marriage arranged in such a manner?"

"What you say is perfectly correct, madame; if you will give your consent, and if I can believe my own heart, this union will, indeed, be an unexampled one," replied Gontran with a glance at me.

"But, really, now I am quite astounded. Things are never done in this way, my good Gontran. These kinds of proposals are always made by the heads of families, with all manner of preambles and preliminaries. The business is talked over, sometimes, for a week at a time, and then, after a few more preliminaries, the young lady is sent for, and told that it is just possible she may stand some chance of being married some day, and that in such a case, such or such a young man with such and such advantages in his favour, would seem to be a suitable husband for her."

"Well, aunt!" I said gaily, to Mademoiselle de Maran, "just take for granted that all this tedious week of preliminaries has already elapsed, and that you have told the young lady a suitable offer has been made for her."

"What then?" said my aunt.

"Why, the young lady accepts the offer with profound gratitude," was my reply to Mademoiselle de Maran, and for the first time in my life I pressed tenderly her hand, which I had taken. That hand was as cold as ice. She kept mine squeezed tightly for some time, between her long, fleshless fingers, while she fixed a piercing gaze upon my face, and at last smiled, as only she herself could smile.

I could not conquer a feeling of vague dread, at that moment; but it soon vanished.

"You are willing, then, my child, to marry that abominable rake, are you? Very well, so let it be, then, I will not oppose

you. I give my consent, provided, however, the marriage be approved by your guardian, M. d'Orbeval, and by your uncle, Gontran."

"It was his intention to have opened the subject to you himself, madame," replied M. de Lancry, who was transported with joy.

"Oh! aunt, you are, indeed, a second mother to me!" I exclaimed, uncontrollably moved, and embracing Mademoiselle de Maran with enthusiastic tenderness.

"Ha! ha! ha! Do you hear this madcap?" said my aunt, laughing loudly with that harsh and bitter laugh of hers, "a second mother indeed!"

Alas! I had spoken blasphemy, when I gave the name of mother to Mademoiselle de Maran, and cruelly did the Almighty punish me for it.

That evening, at nine o'clock, Gontran returned with his uncle, M. de Versac, who announced, officially, to my aunt, that the King had been kind enough to allow him to settle the succession to his title of Duke, and to his rank of Peer, on M. de Lancry, at the latter's marriage.

"By which means, you will be a Duchess some day, which is, decidedly, agreeable, especially when you have an income exceeding a hundred thousand francs a-year, in the bargain," observed Mademoiselle de Maran.

She then added—

"Talking of incomes, I have given orders to say I am not at home, this evening. I and M. de Versac have got settlements, *et cetera*, to discuss, and lovers know nothing about that sort of thing. Be kind enough, therefore, to leave us in peace, and get along with you into my library."

What can I tell you, my friend, of that evening, spent so deliciously in talking of a future, which was arrayed in such gorgeous hues? Was it possible to unite more certain chances of happiness? Wit, beauty, fascination—delicacy, merit, birth and fortune—were not all these advantages to be found in him who was about to become my husband?



## CHAPTER XVII.

### URSULA'S LETTER.

ON going up to my own apartments, what was my surprise to find, in my study, an enormous basket full of jessamines and heliotropes, my favourite flowers? It was now February; only

since the morning had Gontran acquired, as it were, the right to offer me a *bouquet*, and I could not imagine how, in so short a time, he had been able to collect such a mass of flowers—flowers, too, which at that season of the year, were, if anything, more rare than valued. I was deeply touched by this attention. Blondeau was in the room, and I told her all my happiness, and all my hopes. After listening to me attentively, that excellent woman replied—

“Certainly, mademoiselle, *M. le Vicomte de Lancry* is as fascinating as you say—I believe it. It is possible, too, he may be a Duke some day ; but permit me to observe that before taking so irrevocable a step as marriage, it is always prudent to make enquiries.”

“Enquiries ! What do you mean ? You must be mad ! Do you not suppose that his uncle, *M. de Versac*, has given every satisfactory information to my aunt ?”

Blondeau shook her head.

“The accounts which relations are apt to give, mademoiselle, are not always to be depended upon ; we must not trust implicitly to their reports, nor often to those of the world.”

“What can you mean ?”

“Now, mademoiselle, if you would allow me, I could manage to find out a good many things, by making the Viscount’s servants gossip down stairs.”

“Oh ! that would be shameful !” I exclaimed, “Is it you who dare to suggest such a vile system of *espionnage* to me ? Recollect that if you attach the least value to my affection for you, you will this instant promise me not to put the least question to *M. de Lancry’s* servants.”

“But, mademoiselle, it is your aunt, to speak correctly, who has arranged this marriage ; and do you forget all her wicked treatment—her hatred for the poor Marchioness, your mother, who died of a broken heart, from Mademoiselle de Maran’s cruelty ? Oh ! mademoiselle, reflect well before you bind yourself for ever—forgive me for speaking to you thus—I am but a poor woman ; but I love you like a child of my own, and that feeling gives me ideas above my station, and courage, at the same time, to express them to you. Poor mademoiselle ! you are so confiding, so good, so generous, that you distrust no one ; you think just the same of Mademoiselle Ursule ; but I do not believe her to be sincere in spite of all her sighs and her airs of a would-be martyr.”

“Listen to me, Blondeau, I can understand that a feeling of jealousy for my affection towards her, may induce you to speak unjustly of Mademoiselle d’Orbeval, and I can, therefore, excuse such a feeling on your part ; but I must request that you will not permit yourself the least allusion to a marriage which I am determined to contract, because it is an honourable, and promises to

be a happy one. I know what I am about ; I am no longer a child. It was not Mademoiselle de Maran who advised this union ; but I myself spoke to her on the subject. Besides, I feel there, in my heart, that were my mother living, she would approve the choice which that heart has made."

"Mademoiselle, I will make but one more observation. If the information which one might obtain respecting the Viscount should be satisfactory, as you yourself are certain it would be, what difference can it make to you, if—?"

"Listen," I said to Blondeau in a tone of great decision, "I cannot prevent you from doing what you may take into your head ; but whatever might be the pain which I should feel (and, doubtless, it would be considerable) at depriving myself of your services, I positively declare to you, that if you say another word to me upon this subject, I will immediately discharge you, after having made due provision for your future wants."

"Ah ! mademoiselle, do not look at me like that. Oh ! God, it is just like the time when you were a little girl, and when, led away by your aunt's wicked counsels, you told me I '*loved money better than anything.*'"

And the poor woman burst into tears.

"Ah !" I said to her with painful impatience, and almost harshly, "I was so happy just now ; why have you interrupted that happiness with these absurd fancies of yours ?"

And then, not choosing to let any profane hand touch the precious basket of flowers which Gontran had sent me, I took it up and carried it into my room. From that day I grew accustomed to have flowers close to me, without feeling any effect from them but a slight sensation of stupor, by no means disagreeable.

By degrees, the impatience, which Blondeau's observations had caused me, subsided under the influence of that day's enchanting remembrances. My mind had been so wholly absorbed, that I had not yet opened Ursula's letter, announcing her marriage.

That letter I have preserved, as well as several others—here it is.

You will remark, in reading it, that the style is somewhat stilted and romantic. I often lectured my cousin upon this manner of writing, but was unable to correct her of the habit.

You, my friend, who know almost all the various phases of my *friendship* for Ursula, and the consequences of her marriage, you, like myself, will be unable to check a bitter smile, when you peruse these piteous, mournful lines, in which she throws so lugubriously round herself the dark drapery of a victim.

But, *then, times had not changed* ; all my illusions were in their full force, and I was cruelly pained at this mixture of Ursula's

misery. I have nothing more to say about the letter, except that it was written in a remarkably neat and steady hand ; the wax was black, and the seal was a death's head, a fantastic emblem which Ursula possessed, engraved upon a pebble, and to which she was very partial.

“ Saint Norbet, February, 1830.

“ MATILDA, it is done, your poor Ursula is sacrificed, and nothing is now left for her but to devote her whole existence to tears and mourning. Scarcely through the gloomy future which awaits her, can she discern some consolatory rays, which, doubtless, will owe all their light to your cherished friendship. But, oh ! God, why should I be astonished at the new blow which has fallen upon me ?”

“ Have I not long grown habituated to suffering ? What can a victim resigned to her misery like myself do, but bow the head and weep ?

“ Forgive me, my friend, my sister, for coming to darken your joys by these mournful accents which will force their passage from my desolate soul, for, my presentiments will not deceive me ; you will be happy, you *are* happy, you will marry him you love. So beautiful, so wealthy, so charming, you have but to be seen, in order to fascinate.

“ Poor Ursula, on the contrary, without beauty, without attraction, without fortune, has been, almost from her birth, consecrated to unhappiness. How can it be helped ? It is her destiny. But what do I say ? No, no ; I am unjust. Did I not meet you on my dreary road ? Did you not extend a friendly hand to the little forsaken one ? and has she not been indebted to your generosity—to your touching friendship, for a brilliant education, that most precious of all gifts, as Mademoiselle de Maran is never weary of impressing upon me, and with reason.

“ Is it not to you that I have owed, and owe still, that feeling which is the dearest and the sweetest to my heart ? Alas ! were it not for that—were it not for the involuntary hope which it inspires, I should have died of despair ere this, and you could have done nothing more for your friend than weep over her memory.

“ Listen to me, Matilda ; you will call it madness, and so it may be ; but a melancholy and mournful madness, I assure you. I am a prey to gloomy presentiments—I know not what future destiny awaits me—whatever may be the result, I wish to leave you a remembrance of your poor Ursula—I wish to give you my books, and those little coral ornaments you have seen me wear so often.

“ Alas ! I am portionless ; I have nothing—forgive the poverty

of my gifts ; but, at least, they will recal to your heart the remembrance of the days when we worked together—the remembrance of our innocent and girlish coquetry—will they not do this, Matilda ? You will weep for your friend ; and even in the midst of those brilliant assemblies, of which you will be the queen, will not a vague remembrance of your Ursula sometimes pass through your thoughts ?

“ I would make my final resting-place here. Often have I entered the modest village cemetery, and nothing about it is repulsive ; it is a verdant, green sward, enclosed by a hedge of elder trees and hawthorns, whose blossoms would smile in spring, a brief smile, ere they, too, faded and fell upon the resting-place of the dead. A few simple, wooden crosses are scattered here and there, and oh ! sweet would it be to me, could I, too, repose there, undistinguished from the humble tenants of those unknown graves ; for, like them, I should have passed through this dreary world unnoticed and unmarked.

“ Pardon me, Matilda, for beginning my letter in this mournful strain ; but my heart is a prey to such piercing anguish, that I have suffered myself to be carried away by the bitterness of my feelings.

“ But I must tell you the subject of my tears.

“ I am about to marry !

“ What a marriage, good God ! Farewell dreams of my girlhood ! Farewell, my vague and delicious hopes ! and oh ! bitterest pang of all—farewell that existence, with its every instant of devoted affection, which I longed to spend with you.

“ For a moment I thought of resisting the terrible and implacable will of my father ; but I felt that my strength would soon fail me in so unequal a struggle, and that I should be crushed in the contest ; besides, I had a far more powerful reason to consider resignation as my duty. I obeyed ; you shall soon know why.

“ Eight days ago, the very day I had written to you, unconscious of the fate that awaited me, my father sent for me into his room. You have never seen my father except in society, or in the presence of Mademoiselle de Maran, of whom he stands much in awe, and, doubtless, he has only appeared a grave and methodical person to you. Here, however, he is used to domineer, and to speak as a stern and inflexible master ; his countenance, even, is totally different in its expression, and becomes harsh, nay, almost threatening.

“ ‘ You are portionless,’ he said to me, ‘ and it is time to think of an establishment for you. I have found an unexpectedly advantageous match—a young man, with an income of sixty thousand livres, besides expectations, and the chances of his income being increased ; for he manages his fortune marvellously well, and is a

thorough man of business. He is coming here to-morrow, with his mother. Take your measures so as to please him, for if he likes you, the match is a settled affair. Above all, be unaffected and cheerful, for M. Sécherin is a good-humoured young man, plain in manners, and without a particle of ceremony. I will now leave you to reflect upon what I have said, for I have to go to my *Santaies* farm. Upon my word that unlucky estate costs me more than it brings me in, and you had needs to make a good match, so as not to be left, after my death, in a position even below mediocrity.'

"Without giving me time to answer a word, my father left me by myself.

"Oh! my friend, I cannot tell you into what an abyss of misery I felt myself to fall, when I heard those fatal words. I who, as you well know, have ever, like yourself, pictured in my dreams, the ecstatic union of two hearts, which are sure, sooner or later, to meet together, because each is always involuntarily looking for the other.

"I spent that night in tears. You will, perhaps, ask me, my good and tender sister, if I had forgotten your generous promise, either to share your fortune with me, in order to facilitate my consulting my own heart in marriage, or else to keep me always with you, if no suitable union should present itself. No, Matilda, no; I had not forgotten that promise! I knew that your heart was magnanimous and noble enough to keep it, and it was for that very reason that I resolved to render impossible the sacrifice which you wished to make to our friendship.

"Blinded by the affectionate devotion of your heart—a devotion as admirable as it was imprudent—you had not given a thought to the future; your wealth, though considerable, would not bear the division you proposed; with your actual fortune, you are an opulent heiress, and might aspire to a most brilliant match; but were you to share that fortune with me, your chances would be diminished by a moiety.

"Doubtless, to be ever with you, has been one of my girlhood's delightful dreams. But who can tell whether such an arrangement would be accepted by him whom you might select as a husband? Oh! God, I would sooner die a thousand deaths than be the cause of the slightest disagreement between yourself and him! I have resigned myself, therefore, Matilda, and in my friendship—in my devotion to you, I have found strength so to resign myself.

"Nay, I shall eternally bless the sacrifice which I have imposed upon myself, for I shall think that by it, I may have, perhaps, contributed to secure your future happiness.

Alas! it has cost me much, and I wept many and bitter tears during the night which preceded first interview with M. Sécherin.

“ Dare I tell, dare I confess everything to you ? For a moment an impious thought checked the course of my tears. My father's house is surrounded by moats of immense depth—I got up—I opened my window—I tried to measure its height with my eyes ; the moon was veiled by clouds ; it was a melancholy winter's night ; the wind moaned ; I leant over the balcony, and said, to myself—‘ Better far a death, however guilty, than the miserable existence which awaits me.’ I was seized with dizziness, and I was about, perhaps, to yield to a fatal impulse, when in bidding adieu to all I loved—that is, to you—your image, rising to my memory, restrained me. Thank you—thank you again, Matilda, for that remembrance stopped me at the very edge of the abyss—prevented me from committing a crime, and I resigned myself to live.

Alas ! that life, for which I so feebly struggle with the sorrows that overwhelm me, that life will it not soon wear out ! Oh ! if that should indeed be so, I would bless God for withdrawing me from earth, and I would accept death, at His hands, as a sweet recompense for the many sacrifices to which I have had the courage to submit.

“ The fatal day arrived ; in the morning my father renewed his instructions to me with fresh severity, and I awaited with as much despair, as mournful indifference, the moment when I should be introduced to M. Sécherin.

“ In spite of the orders and anger of my father, I had paid no attention to my toilet. Good God, how could I have the courage to do so ! I was dressed in black, and that dress was a faithful emblem of the thoughts which pierced my heart. My hair fell down in long ringlets on each side of my face, which had become pale from sorrow, and I bent so low under the burden of misery, which oppressed me, that Mademoiselle de Maran would, most certainly, and that time with reason, have reproached me with being deformed.

“ My father's harsh remonstrances were all in vain—in vain he commanded me to hold myself more gracefully, and to put on a cheerful look. I could not conquer the painful emotions which agitated me, and I scarcely turned my head, when M. Sécherin and his mother were announced.

“ M. Eloi Sécherin is, according to my father's account, engaged in business undertakings of vast extent, and he adds daily to the fortune which was left him by his father. I can tell you nothing about his appearance or his manners, for I beheld everything darkly, and through a veil of tears.

“ M. Eloi Sécherin must be easily seduced, for after he was gone, my father came to me and was profuse in compliments, assuring me that my manner had been unaffected, unpretending, in a word,

perfect, and that M. Sécherin and his mother had gone away delighted with me.

"I resemble some poor prisoner whose eyes are still unable to penetrate the icy darkness which shuts her in. It was but very vaguely that I saw M. Sécherin and his mother, and I can retain but a confused idea of either. I heard, rather than listened, to a few words, and replied mechanically to them. The articles of marriage are to be signed this very day, and the marriage itself, I believe, is to take place to-morrow or the day after.

"When you see me at Paris, a few days hence, you will open—will you not? your arms to the poor victim who is so obedient and so resigned.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Matilda, for thus coming to throw a gloom over your happiness, for a secret presentiment tells me that you *are* happy, and that you are loved by *him*. Since the ball at the embassy you know it; I told you *you would love him*, and I am certain he has shown himself deserving of that love by returning it.

"Happy, happy Matilda! it requires all my certain assurance of your felicity to aid me in supporting the miserable chain of life which I am about to drag on—till the burden of my sufferings becomes too heavy, and then I shall quit this world of grief, casting back one last farewell look of regret upon the years I passed with you.

"Adieu, adieu—one more miserable adieu! For an instant I had thought of entreating you, on my knees, to be present at my marriage, and thus to support my sinking courage; but I reflected that the sight of you would deprive me of all the little energy that I have remaining, by recalling to my mind how much I lose by our separation. Adieu! once more, when you see your poor Ursula again, you will, I am well assured, recognise her with difficulty.

"Adieu! oh! adieu! my strength fails me—I have wept so much—to thee, to thee, from my heart, from the very depth of that heart,

"URSULA D'ORBEVAL."

I was thunder-struck at this letter.

One thought predominated in my mind, that Ursula had, as she told me herself, literally sacrificed herself for me, for fear she should be an obstacle to my marriage with M. de Lancry.

I next reproached my cousin for having placed so little reliance upon my affection, and that of Gontran. Such a deep melancholy, such a profound despair pervaded her letter, that I became seriously uneasy, fearing that Ursula would become alarmingly ill from depression.

I had but one hope that Ursula's marriage might be delayed, I determined to beg Gontran next day to set off immediately for Touraine, that he might entreat my cousin to break off this marriage, and that he might, in person, assure her that not the least obstacle would be thrown in the way of our union by the fulfilment of my promises to her.

I passed a most agitated night, and next day awaited Gontran's coming with the greatest anxiety. He did not, for an instant, hesitate to comply with my request that he would go to Ursula ; he understood, and shared in my fears, with a kindness that was perfectly adorable. We agreed that he should say nothing about this expedition to Mademoiselle de Maran, and that he should set off instantly. We were still conversing upon this subject, which was such an interesting one to me, when a letter from Tours was brought to me.

Ursula's marriage had taken place. The letter I had received from her the day before, ought to have been delivered several days earlier.

I was quite in despair at this intelligence. I was so happy in my own love for Gontran, that I was the better able to understand the cruel misery of Ursula's fate.

My cousin wrote me word that she should arrive in Paris, in a few days, with her father and her husband, and that she should spend the latter part of the winter in the capital.

I went up stairs to my own apartment, to write to my cousin—to complain of her want of confidence—to console, to encourage her ; in a word, to set before her eyes the advantages which her misery prevented her, perhaps, from perceiving in this marriage, which was at present her despair.

I found Blondeau in my study, and she told me that a woman wished to speak to me, who had come in order to solicit my aid in a work of charity.

I desired Blondeau to show her in.

My visiter was a woman closely wrapped up in a cloak, and her features were completely concealed by an extremely thick, black veil.

When Blondeau had left us alone together, the stranger threw off her cloak, and raised her veil.

It was the Duchess de Richeville.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE INTERVIEW.

I WAS SO astonished—I might, almost, say terrified, at the sight of Madame de Richeville, that I leant, for support, on the back of an arm-chair which was placed near me.

The features of the Duchess, however, wore, by no means, an expression of menace. She appeared to me to be much changed, and to have become very thin ; she seemed under the influence of some strong emotion, and gazed at me with a look of intense interest.

She hastened to address me in the following words, as if to induce me to listen to her, and to put myself at ease with her :—

“ Strange, mademoiselle, as this visit may seem to you, do not be uneasy at it ; I come in the name of a mutual friend, M. de Mortagne.”

“ Has he arrived then, madame ?”

“ Alas ! he has not ; and though he is expected every minute, I am not, as yet, able to tell you anything about his mysterious voyage ; but I know that he feels a deep interest in you. Eight years ago, just after his last interview with Mademoiselle de Maran, he told me everything—the family council, and the scene with your aunt, when he carried you in his arms into Mademoiselle de Maran’s room, notwithstanding the snarlings of Felix. I enter into all these details, in order to convince you that, that man, the most generous of men, reposed the utmost confidence in me. It is in the name of that confidence, mademoiselle, that I am come to ask you for your own.”

“ Mine, madame ?—*you* ?”—

I laid such a stress upon the word *you*, that Madame de Richeville replied with a bitter smile—

“ Poor child ! can you, who are still so young, already put faith in the calumnies of the world ?—can they have already impaired that enchanting kindness of disposition which M. de Mortagne foresaw in you, and which every feature of yours reveals ? Why receive me so coldly, when the step which I have taken is dictated by your interest alone, and has been taken, I may say, under the

authority of a man who was one of your poor mother's best friends ? Tell me, why do you receive me thus ?"

It is impossible to describe the insinuating charm of Madame de Richeville's voice, or to give an idea of the half-melancholy, half-affectionate look which accompanied her words. I was moved in spite of the secret jealousy with which she inspired me, and I replied, with less distance in my manner—

"I may be allowed, Madame, to be astonished, at a visit which I had no right to hope for, not having the honour of your acquaintance."

"About a month ago, when we were coming out from the Opera, did I not say these words to you, 'Poor child—beware ?'"

"I certainly heard those words, madame ; but I knew not with what intent they were uttered."

"You knew not ?" asked Madame de Richeville with a piercing look, which brought a blush into my cheek.

Unwilling, doubtless, to increase my confusion, she continued, throwing, if possible, still more affection into her look and her voice—

"Listen to me—I must give you some explanations respecting the past, to induce you to put faith in my words, and in order that I may begin the subject which brings me here. M. de Mortagne was always a friend of mine, and in former days he rendered me one of those services, which a generous heart can only repay by a whole life's friendship ; and when I say friendship, I mean, also, the sacred duties which that tie inspires. I know not in what black colours I may have been represented to you by your aunt ; but some day I hope you will know that my most deadly enemies have never dared to deny my courage and devotion in the cause of my friends. Hereafter, perhaps, you will learn the motive of my eternal gratitude towards M. de Mortagne. I knew—I know now, all the interest he feels in you, and what he loves, I love too. Here, then, is one reason, is there not, why you should interest me in so lively a manner ? There are many who hate me bitterly and implacably ; but none with more virulence, and more determination, than Mademoiselle de Maran. I am aware that your aunt did all in her power to render your childhood unhappy, and now she is doing all she can to render you the most miserable of women. You ought to detest her as much as I do. Here, then, is another reason why you should interest me. To rescue you from her wicked machinations, to open your eyes to fresh treachery on her part—in a word, to prove my friendship—my gratitude for M. de Mortagne, by acting in your behalf, as he would have acted himself ; here, surely, are motives sufficiently powerful to explain the interest which I feel in you."

"I may, madame, have had formerly some cause to complain of

Mademoiselle de Maran ; but within these last few days she has done so much for me, that it is my duty to forget the vexations of my girlish days."

I purposely laid a stress upon the words, *she has done so much for me*, that I might make Madame de Richeville understand that I alluded to my approaching marriage with Gontran.

The Duchess shook her head in a melancholy manner, and said to me—"She has done so much for you !—yes, you speak truly ; she never did so much before for your—misery !"

From that moment I fancied I could guess the purpose of Madame de Richeville's visit. She loved Gontran ; his intended marriage with me rendered her furious, and she had, doubtless, come to calumniate M. de Lancry, in order to break off, if possible, this abhorred union. This reflection made Gontran still more dear to me, because endeavours were used to wrest his heart from me. I felt almost proud that a woman like Madame de Richeville, so beautiful, so haughty, so contemptuous towards the world, should have recourse to disguise, and to the most adroit and most complicated falsehoods, in order to play, with all humility, so odious a part in my presence. Being quite determined to consider the conduct of the duchess under this point of view, I replied very drily to Madame de Richeville—

"I repeat, madame, that *now* I can only feel profoundly grateful for, and touched by, all that Mademoiselle de Maran has done for me."

"It is just so," said Madame de Richeville, "and because it is so, and because you may blindly fall into the trap they have set for you, unhappy child, I have come to you now. You are abandoned by all—isolated from all ! Look round you, and of whom can you ask advice ; in whom can you confide, since the departure of your only friend—your only protector ?"

"You are right, madame, I have no one,"

"No one ! not even myself, do you mean ? Matilda, this is cruel—oh ! do not be offended at this familiarity. I am twice as old as you, and then I do not know what I can do or say to break through this icy coldness which places such a barrier between us. Forgive me, if I employ words that are, perchance, too affectionate, in addressing you. Good God ! at such a moment as this can I pay attention to what I utter from my heart ?"

It required all my prejudice against, and jealousy of, Madame de Richeville, to prevent my being disarmed by the enchanting and graceful manner in which the Duchess uttered these last words. As invariably happens, in the disposition of mind in which I then was, certain words are sure to move one deeply, or to disgust one still more, from their appearance of hypocrisy. I replied then to Madame de Richeville—

"I am desirous, madame, to know the purpose of this interview ; if its only end be, to awaken my former subjects of complaint against Mademoiselle de Maran, though thanking you for the interest you express towards me in the name of M. de Mortagne, I can but assure you, once more, madame, that *now* I have every reason to be pleased with Mademoiselle de Maran's conduct towards me."

"You must have suffered much already ; your young feelings must have been sadly bruised, to enable you to maintain such self-possession at seventeen," said Madame de Richeville, looking at me with an expression of melancholy compassion, "or your prejudices against me must be, indeed, invincible."

She then added, speaking to herself—"What is the use of attempting ?—what matters it ?—it is a duty"—and addressing herself to me, she said eagerly—

"Yes, it is a duty, and I will perform it. They are desirous of marrying you to M. de Lancry ?"

"Mademoiselle de Maran and M. de Versac have merely approved a resolution which I and M. de Lancry had taken beforehand, madame ; and this marriage is a settled affair," I replied, quite proud and triumphant at my ability to crush my rival by these words, which were, perhaps, but unbecoming ones, to fall from the lips of a young girl.

"Do you know what M. de Lancry is ?"

"Madame"—

"Well, I will tell you, then. M. de Lancry is a delightful man, remarkable for gracefulness, wit, and courage—a man of perfect manners and finished elegance—all this you know—do you not unhappy girl ? This brilliant exterior has seduced you, nor do I reproach you for this ; but beneath that brilliant exterior are concealed a seared heart, an unconquerable selfishness, and an insatiable thirst for money, that endeavours to satisfy itself by the maddest orgies of the gambling-house. His fortune has been long completely squandered away, and his debts are considerable. Believe me, Matilda, Mademoiselle de Maran has given every facility and encouragement to this marriage, because such a union will throw you headlong down an abyss of incalculable misery. I implore you, then, in the name of your friend, M. de Mortagne, wait till he returns, which will be ere long, before you marry this man ; you do not know whom you have chosen ! Once more, I entreat you, wait for M. de Mortagne, oh ! wait for him, in the name of your sainted mother !"

"Enough, madame !" I indignantly exclaimed ; "I will not suffer my mother's name to be invoked to protect the calumny which you—you, the Duchess de Richeville—have condescended to utter. Ah ! madame, how have I ever injured you, that you

should attempt to envenom that which I looked upon, and look upon still—God is my witness—as the only happiness—the only hope of my existence ? Ah ! I shudder with fear when I think that these odious words, had they been uttered by any other but yourself, madame, might, perhaps, have impaired the confidence, the admiration, and the love with which M. de Lancry has inspired me.”

“ You would, perhaps, have believed these words, if any other had uttered them,” repeated Madame de Richeville, looking at me attentively, and seemingly endeavouring to discover the meaning with which I had spoken, “ and why do you place less confidence in me than in any one else ? ”

“ Do *you* ask me why, madame ? Have you not been speaking of M. de Lancry ? And, solitary as my life has been, yet, certain reports”—

“ Ah ! unhappy child ! she thinks me jealous of M. de Lancry ! ” exclaimed Madame de Richeville, in tones of surprise, almost of terror. “ Then, indeed, is all lost, Matilda, if you believe that. Oh, God ! oh, God ! you must have heard me most foully slandered, to believe me worthy of so infamous an accusation. Passionately in love with M. de Lancry myself, I have come here to calumniate him in your ears, in order to put beyond the pale of possibility, a marriage which would be my despair. Speak—speak—do you not believe this ? ”

“ Excuse my replying, madame.”

“ Well, then, I will make a confession to you—a painful—oh ! a most cruel one ; but what matters it ? It may, perhaps, save you.”

After a long hesitation, Madame de Richeville continued at last, with a trembling voice, blushing deeply, and exhibiting every mark of confusion—

“ Know, then, that I, like yourself, have loved M. de Lancry ; yes, his brilliant exterior seduced me, as it has you. But I soon discovered all his egotism, indifference, harshness, nay, even cruelty, when once his vanity was satisfied ; so that now I know not whether I hate or despise him most.”

These last words of Madame de Richeville appeared to me so odious, that, losing all self controul, I exclaimed—

“ And yet, madame, at the ball at the Austrian Embassy, you did not think thus.”

Madame de Richeville made a slight movement with her shoulders, a movement expressive of impatience and pain.

“ If you will but listen to me, you will know why I acted as I did at that ball, and you will acquire a knowledge of what M. de Lancry really is. Nearly a year ago I had just met with a severe misfortune ; I was the most wretched of women. May you never

feel, Matilda, how suffering enfeebles us, may you never be unhappy, so that you may not discover the dangerous fascinations of a friendly voice when it consoles and pities us. I believed M. de Lancry's protestations ; I became sincerely and devotedly attached to him ; I was the best and tenderest of friends towards him, and I lived then almost in privacy, endeavouring, as my only occupation, to anticipate every thought, every desire of his. One day, I missed his accustomed visit ; I grew uneasy, and sent to his residence. He had set off for London that morning, without writing me a line, and leaving me to learn from the world's mouth, that he had gone to England to join some actress who, for some few days previous, had shared his attentions with me. This conduct was so brutal, so cowardly, that my anger turned against myself, and I was indignant at having been the dupe of such a man. To my great surprise, a most complete and contemptuous indifference succeeded those tender feelings, which the day before I had fancied indestructible. There are some insults so miserable in their baseness, that they excite pity instead of anger. When I met M. de Lancry at the embassy, it was the first time I had seen him since he had so vilely sacrificed me. In spite of his assurance, he was embarrassed. I felt nothing—nothing but a wish to prove to him my contempt, by a kind of careless affability of manner—I wished for no further revenge. But to men in general, and especially to men of M. de Lancry's disposition, nothing is more wounding, nothing more cruel, than to see a smile of indifference on the lips of the victim at whom they have aimed a death blow. I have told you with what interest M. de Mortagne had spoken to me about you, and I was looking at you with an affectionate curiosity, when Mademoiselle de Maran addressed me, with some of those bitter words, of which you were unable to understand the hidden meaning. I had sufficient command over myself to answer her by a simple fact, which was sure to strike her almost with terror—the approaching arrival of M. de Mortagne, which I knew would soon take place. He has been the victim of an abominable plot ; but you will see him before long.

" Good God, madame !" I exclaimed, " what do you mean ? M. de Mortagne !"

" I cannot tell you all yet," replied Madame de Richeville, " but he will soon be here. It is for this reason that I implore you to wait before you contract this fatal marriage. A few more words," added the Duchess, perceiving my impatience, " and then I will leave you. That very evening, at the embassy, the projects of your aunt and M. de Versac were no longer a secret. Every body was saying that the Duke had only recalled his nephew from England, that he might not lose the chance of such a wealthy match. When, on the next evening but one, I saw you at the Opera, in the

box belonging to the Gentlemen of the Chamber, I no longer doubted the reality of these reports. Your aunt and M. de Versac had designedly confirmed them, by suffering you to appear openly in the Opera box with M. de Lancry, in order to prevent the proposals of any other suitor. Mademoiselle de Maran knew that a young man, whom I shall mention to you presently, in whom M. de Mortagne takes a most lively interest and who had seen you at the embassy, was about to ask for your hand in marriage, so deep an impression had you made upon his heart. I perceived your dangerous position, and as we came out of the opera-house, I said to you, 'Poor child, beware!' I resolved not to confine myself to that fruitless warning; I wished to have told you what I have said to-day, before M. de Lancry had made any impression on your heart; favoured as he is, by the natural advantages which he possesses, and by the protection of your aunt, he was sure to please you. Unfortunately, I was indisposed the morning after the Opera, and I subsequently became so seriously unwell, that I could not put my project into execution. In this difficulty I confided the whole matter to one of my female friends, Madame de Mirecourt, who is in the constant habit of seeing your aunt; I charged her to endeavour to see you in private, so that she might enlighten you as to the marriage which they wish you to contract, and might, at the same time, entreat you to await the return of M. de Mortagne. Your aunt, however, distrusted Madame de Mirecourt, knowing her intimacy with me, and prevented her from seeing you alone. Then I deplored, still more bitterly, the illness which kept me a prisoner at home. Every day would, doubtless, increase your love for M. de Lancry; I longed to write to you, but I feared your aunt would intercept the letter, and I was in despair, so deep an interest do I feel in you, when I reflected that, perhaps, if warned in time, you would not have pledged your affections; I suffered cruelly from this thought. But, alas! Matilda, I see by your coldness, that I cannot convince you, and influenced as you are, by distrust, you persist in asking yourself what can be the motive of the extreme interest which I profess to feel in your fate. Good God! must I repeat once more that in attempting to save you, I am paying the debt of gratitude which I owe to M. de Mortagne?"

"And you avenge yourself, at the same time upon M. de Lancry, madame," I replied with bitterness.

"Avenge myself, Matilda!" the Duchess gently answered. "Is it absolutely necessary, then, that such should be the motive for a feeling of affectionate compassion towards yourself? Is it not sufficient to break my heart, when I see you, poor girl, young and interesting as you are, abandoned and lost among all these wicked egotists, to become at last a victim to your aunt's hatred, and to M. de Lancry's love of money?"

"This is too much, madame!" I exclaimed with all the violence of insulted pride. "Am I, then, after all, so destitute of beauty and mental qualities, that M. de Lancry should only seek my hand with a view to my fortune? Because he has deceived you—odiously deceived you, I will allow—is it any reason that he should not appreciate a heart which yields itself up to him with rapture? And who can say, madame, that you loved him, as he deserves to be loved? And who can say that any one of the women whom he has so infamously deceived, has loved as I love him? And who can say, madame, that it is not because his soul is noble and great in its feelings, that he knows how to measure all the vast interval which separates a guilty connection from a love which is holy in the eyes of God and man? By what right do you reproach him with cowardice—you, who have erred so deeply? By what right—in a word, do you dare to compare a love like yours to mine?"

"Oh! my God—my God! that I should be forced to hear this," said Madame de Richeville, burying her face in her hands with an expression of pain and humility, which would have struck me, had I been less indignant; but, alas! I could not restrain my language; and, oh! how deeply do I now regret its injustice and its cruelty! Carried away by my desire to avenge Gontran, for the calumnies of which I believed him to be the object, I continued—

"You assert that M. de Lancry has squandered his fortune—that he is a ruined man—so much the better, madame, and I am doubly blessed in being able to offer him my own. You say he has had recourse to the gaming-table—henceforth, being a wealthy man, he need not recur to that fatal expedient. You think that he is deceiving me, madame; do not let this, I entreat you, cause you any uneasiness; envy and jealousy are often apt to mistake their own wicked hopes, for a prophecy of the future. True love is happier; for, strong in its own devotion, and in its own generosity it foresees with certainty the recompense which it merits and obtains."

Madame de Richeville raised her beautiful face, which, to my great surprise, was bathed in tears, and bore evident marks of extreme emotion. In spite of my indignation, I could not help being touched at seeing a woman generally so proud and haughty, listen with so much resignation to my reproaches. She took my hand, which I had not the courage to withdraw, and said to me in a tone of profound melancholy—

"All is over, Matilda—there is no hope left—you are the victim of that sophistry, which has ruined me—which has ruined many women. I, too, when I loved M. de Lancry, said to myself, 'Am I not more beautiful—more fascinating than my rivals?

They have been unable to fix or subdue that inconstant, haughty, and contemptuous heart—that heart which makes a sport of the most devoted feelings ; but I will succeed.’ Alas ! Matilda, I have told you my disgrace, and how deeply I was outraged. And now, believe not that I wish, for one moment, to compare myself to you, or that I dream of possessing any superiority over the beauty of your person, or the rare assemblage of qualities which distinguish your mind ; it is of that beauty, and of those qualities, that I had formed a nearly accurate idea, and they it is, which have rendered me still more intensely anxious to be of service to the protégée of M. de Mortagne. Poor child, without measuring the force of your words, you made me just now cruelly sensible of the difference between such a love as I could offer to M. de Lancry, and that which you have bestowed upon him. You are right, Matilda. If M. de Lancry were capable of being touched by all the adorable goodness and devotion of your love for him, you might hope to realize your dreams of happiness. But believe me,” added the Duchess, lowering her voice, and fixing her eyes, bathed in tears, upon my face, with a look which went to my very heart—“ believe me, however guilty the passion, whoever the woman that loves, and devotes herself with sincerity to him, no man with a noble heart, and a generous disposition, will ever repay her proofs of deep attachment by insults and cruelty. Such conduct infallibly betrays a natural depravity. And yet, Matilda, perhaps you are right, though you or I may not know it. Perhaps you are destined to effect a complete change in M. de Lancry’s disposition, and certainly if beauty, gracefulness, and the most amiable—the most perfect qualities *can* perform such a miracle, you will succeed. But, alas ! believe me, had I entertained the slightest hope of such a conversion, I should have recoiled from this attempt to shake the faith and trust you feel in his love, as from a deadly crime. However, the future will decide ; farewell, Matilda, farewell ; some day, perhaps, you will know me better—some day, perhaps, poor girl, you will say to me, in bitterness of spirit, ‘ Why did I not listen to you ? ’ But, God knows I would rather continue to be looked upon by your eyes as—what you, doubtless, think I am—a wicked and perfidious woman, than behold my presentiments verified by your misery. Farewell, once more, and for the last time, farewell—you will not wait till the arrival of M. de Mortagne.”

“ Madame,” I replied, touched by Madame de Richeville’s tears, “ I implore you, let us put an end to this conversation. Some words have escaped me, which I regret—deeply regret—but, at least, let those words prove to you that the warmth with which I have defended M. de Lancry, emanated from a heart which is his for ever.”

"One word more, and I leave you," said Madame de Richeville, "what I am going to say, will not alter your determination in the least degree ; but it is my duty not to conceal the projects which M. de Mortagne had formed concerning you. Before his departure for Italy, reflecting upon your future fate, he had, as I have told you, hinted at a marriage between yourself and the son of one of his best friends, M. Abel de Rohegune, who was then about twenty years of age, and whose fortune was considerable. This young man appeared in M. Mortagne's eyes, a suitable match for you. At this present time, M. de Rohegune, by his father's death, who was one of the most noble characters of the day, is the possessor of immense wealth. He has just returned from his travels, all are unanimous in extolling his talents and good qualities, and his countenance, though not handsome, is exceedingly pleasing. He saw you at the embassy, and was struck with your beauty, and had it not been for the affectation with which Mademoiselle de Maran proclaimed, beforehand, your approaching marriage with M. de Lancry, M. de Rohegune would have requested the honour of being presented to you. Had M. de Mortagne been here, he would have introduced his *protégé* to you. Once more, Matilda, I tell you this, to prove to you that your determination not to postpone your marriage till the arrival of your only friend, will, perhaps, be the more painful to him, from the views he entertains of what he considers requisite for your future happiness."

"Were M. de Mortagne, madame—and I shall never forget his kindness—here, in person, I should give him the same answer, that I have made an honourable choice, and that no consideration whatever, shall prevent my union with M. de Lancry," I replied with that inflexible obstinacy which is a characteristic of deep and blind love, when that love is still more exalted by opposition.

"Farewell, then, Matilda !" said Madame de Richeville in a tone of voice, which proved her to be deeply moved. "Assure me that you believe, at least, in the disinterestedness of the step I have taken, and that will console me for having been unable to obtain your confidence. Tell me—oh ! tell me that you will remember me with kindness."

I was about to reply, when Blondeau hastily entered the room, and Madame de Richeville let her veil down.

"Mademoiselle," said Blondeau to me, "Mademoiselle de Maran wishes to see you down stairs."

Madame de Richeville made me a modest curtsy, and left the room.

I have now, my friend, acquired the certainty that Madame de Richeville was not actuated by any odious motive in this conversation. She really felt an affectionate compassion for me. Her

gratitude towards M. de Mortagne, and the interest which my situation inspired were the only motives of the step she had taken.

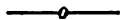
You know, my friend, that the Duchess de Richeville unites, in herself, the strongest contrasts. Half her life is spent in weeping over the faults she has committed, and those tears are from the bottom of her heart, and untinged by hypocrisy. Her exalted station, and her haughty disposition, would render all dissimulation, on her part, as useless, as, indeed, it is impossible. No, she is a creature apart, powerful for evil as for good ; the hands of the Almighty sent her forth pure, noble, and great ; but education, the world, and the life which that world has imposed upon her, have been much more active agents in inducing her to err, than any evil disposition of her own. But she possesses such vigorous qualities, her mind is so discerning, her judgment so superior, her heart still so good, and her soul so noble, that lifting up herself at times from the midst of her miserable recollections and her fervent repentance, she casts a suppliant and despairing glance towards heaven : a smile of bitterness and disdain upon earth.

Hereafter, my friend, I will tell you some admirable traits of this woman, who had, doubtless, erred ; but who was always so shamefully calumniated. I will tell you of her fearful marriage, which alone, perhaps, precipitated her into that abyss whence she at times emerges, purified by a painful expiation.

You may now conceive the bitter remorse which overwhelms me when I remember the contemptuous harshness with which I received her visit—a visit, dictated by a feeling of most touching interest in my fate—dictated—I dare not yet say by a most mournful prescience.

Scarcely had Madame de Richeville departed, when I obeyed my aunt's summons.

The first person I saw sitting close to her was Gontran.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### EXCULPATIONS.

I COULD scarcely refrain from blushing with indignation when I beheld M. de Lancry, and recalled the calumnies of which I believed him to be the victim.

"I have sent for you, Matilda," said my aunt to me, "because Gontran here is worrying me out of my life with questions about

the *corbeille*. He wants to know what is most to your taste, and what dresses you wish for ; you can tell him all this much better than I can ; pray settle about all these fine things yourselves. Yonder are materials for writing."

And she pointed to her desk ; for we happened to be in her library.

Servien came in just at this minute, and said to his mistress—

" M. Bisson is in the drawing-room, mademoiselle."

" And you have left him there by himself ; he'll break everything to pieces !" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran ; and she made a precipitate retreat, in order to prevent any fresh misdeeds on the part of this scientific gentleman, who, after a period of banishment, had been restored again to her good graces.

I was left alone with Gontran, and remained silent ; as I hesitated whether to inform him of Madame de Richeville's visit, Gontran said to me—

" I am delighted at Mademoiselle de Maran's departure, for I wish to speak to you very seriously."

" About the *corbeille* ?" I asked with a smile.

" No," he replied with a grave, almost a melancholy look, which went to my very heart. " Yesterday I talked to you of the future, of my prospects, and my feelings—you believed me ; you deigned to entrust your happiness to my care, and you generously promised to be mine. Yesterday I was so absorbed in rapture at my unhoped for good fortune, that I did not think of relating the past to you ; and yet, the past is ever a security for the good or the evil of the future. A scruple has just seized me. You are an orphan ; your aunt is an intimate friend of my uncle, M. de Versac, and she is greatly prejudiced in my favour. Whatever faults, or even vices, might exist in me, neither she nor M. de Versac would warn you of them—would they ? You have shewn yourself so true hearted—so confiding to me, that your noble conduct imposes certain duties upon myself. You are isolated, or surrounded by persons who are attached to me, and who have, doubtless, represented me in the most advantageous light possible to your eyes. It is my duty, therefore, to enlighten you frankly as to my faults, and as to what may have been blameable, or perhaps, even culpable in my past life. This I will do, without exaggerating the evil ; but with a sincere severity. Afterwards you must pronounce if I am still worthy of you. At least if my evil fate should cause these revelations to produce a decision unfavourable to me, if I thus lose the dearest hope of my existence, I shall still have the consolation of having acted as a man of honour."

While M. de Lanery was thus addressing me, I felt touched with surprise and emotion. Gontran, by a hazard that was almost

miraculous, had, as it were, come half way to meet the reflections which my interview with Madame de Richeville had aroused in my mind.

The instinct of his heart had urged him to justify himself, as if he could have foreseen that he might be attacked. I was delighted with his frankness, and I waited for his confession with more curiosity than uneasiness. I felt, indeed, so completely reassured, that I said to him with a smile—

“I am all attention ; but if it is a confession which I am to hear, be careful—these are things to which I must not listen.”

“I swear to you that nothing can be more serious,” replied Gontran. “When I now look back upon the past, and especially when I am now able to compare the impressions of to-day with those of bygone times, my life appears to me in a wholly different light ; yes, certain thoughts which have existed but confusedly hitherto, are now susceptible of a most clear explanation. I can understand the kind of uneasiness, of painful impatience, which invariably was at hand to tarnish or to break asunder those transitory connections, which I thought at first so fascinating. The more I advanced in life, the more I discovered the hollowness and bitter deception of those passions. I was seeking for happiness, for tranquillity and rest of heart, and all I found was a painful agitation. The women who had sacrificed their duties to me, after a protracted struggle became a prey to remorse, which, often forced me to curse my own guilty happiness, while I was speedily disgusted by the assurance of those who had ceased to blush. And yet, I would say to myself, ‘there must be other happiness than this.’ Hopeless of attaining the end to which every faculty of my soul so imperiously aspired, I soon broke the idol which I had adored ; I experienced a kind of unhallowed joy, in causing *her* to share the bitterness in which my own soul was steeped, and I carried this feeling, perhaps, even to cruelty. Must I accuse myself for this ? I scarcely know. I ought rather, perhaps, to accuse that ideal image which haunted my dreams. Yes ; for it was that image which rendered me so unjust, so severe, for everything which did not resemble it. Were you to ask the world about me, Matilda, you would be told that in breaking off some connections, I have shown myself to be selfish, contemptuous, and cruel. This is true, also. I was dissatisfied with myself ; I was impatient to escape from the fetters of a fictitious happiness, and I was eternally seeking to grasp a felicity which eternally eluded me. The simplest ideas are those which never occur to us, and I was far from thinking that the unknown object, which I so eagerly and so uneasily sought, was *love in marriage*. Nay, had any one at that time given that interpretation to my desires, I should have smiled and doubted. When, however, I saw you, Matilda, the bandage

fell from my eyes ; yes, when I saw you, the past revealed the future to me, and, in a word, the hitherto intangible object of my vague desires put on an appearance of distinct reality in my sight ; in despising those guilty attachments I rendered, if I may be allowed the expression, homage to that pure and holy sentiment which my heart invoked with all its instincts, and which you alone were destined to make known to me."

I was thunder-struck with admiration at hearing Gontran thus explain his past life. By a singular coincidence, he called to his defence those same sophistries which I had opposed to the denunciations of Madame de Richeville.

Gontran's arguments could not fail to make a deep impression upon me. What woman, already passionately in love, would not blindly believe the man who says to her, " I love you, and I will love you the more fervently for the contempt and outrages I have heaped upon everything which was not *you*."

Can there be a more dangerous paradox than this ? Is it not to turn, with fatal adroitness, or rather with a profound knowledge of the human heart—is it not to turn, all the perfidious treacheries of which one has been guilty, into a kind of pedestal on which to erect the fresh idol of one's adoration ? Is not, lastly, that paradox the more dangerous, when the woman who is thus deified, is conscious within herself of bearing not the least resemblance to the women who are immolated at *her* shrine ? Was not this my position with regard to Gontran ? And yet, alas ! was it such a guilty pride in me to believe that my devotion to, and my love for him, were superior to every other love—to every other devotion that he had ever met with ?

Gontran appeared to me to be so entirely exculpated from Madame de Richeville's accusations, that I did not think it necessary to mention my interview with the Duchess. I considered, moreover, that she might have been induced to visit me from a sincere feeling of interest in my fate, and besides she was a friend of M. de Mortagne's, which last reason would, in itself, have been sufficient to insure silence on my part.

Gontran gazed at me with a look of uneasiness, being ignorant of the effect which his words might have had upon me. I offered him my hand, and said with a smile, " Let us talk now about *our* projects for the future."

He shook his head in a melancholy manner, and said to me—

" How good, how generous you are ! But I must not yet say *we*, when I refer to you and myself, for I have more confessions to make to you."

" Well, then—quick—tell me everything—come, what is it ; You have been extravagant—have gambled—your fortune is involved ? Are these the formidable confessions which you have

to make to me ?" And I added, with a smile—"Now, do I not talk to you like an indulgent old relation ?"

"For heaven's sake, Matilda," replied Gontran, "do not jest. Well then, yes ; I have gambled, and for some time, gambled madly ; yes, I sought in that pursuit for emotions which I could find nowhere else. Disgusted at the effrontery of some amours—terrified by the remorse which I had caused—having nothing to attach me to existence—having no future to look to beyond the morrow—feeling that my heart was deadened—blushing for myself and others—loving nothing, and regretting nothing, I threw myself headlong into the abyss of a gambler's life. But I soon got weary of the profitless excitements, the sordid hopes and fears of the gaming-table. Playing, as I did, not for gain, but for self-oblivion, I lost considerably, and my fortune suffered, which, indeed, had already been impaired by the rather large expenditure I had been forced to make, in order to keep up my rank in the Embassy, to which I had been attached. Nevertheless, I still possess"—

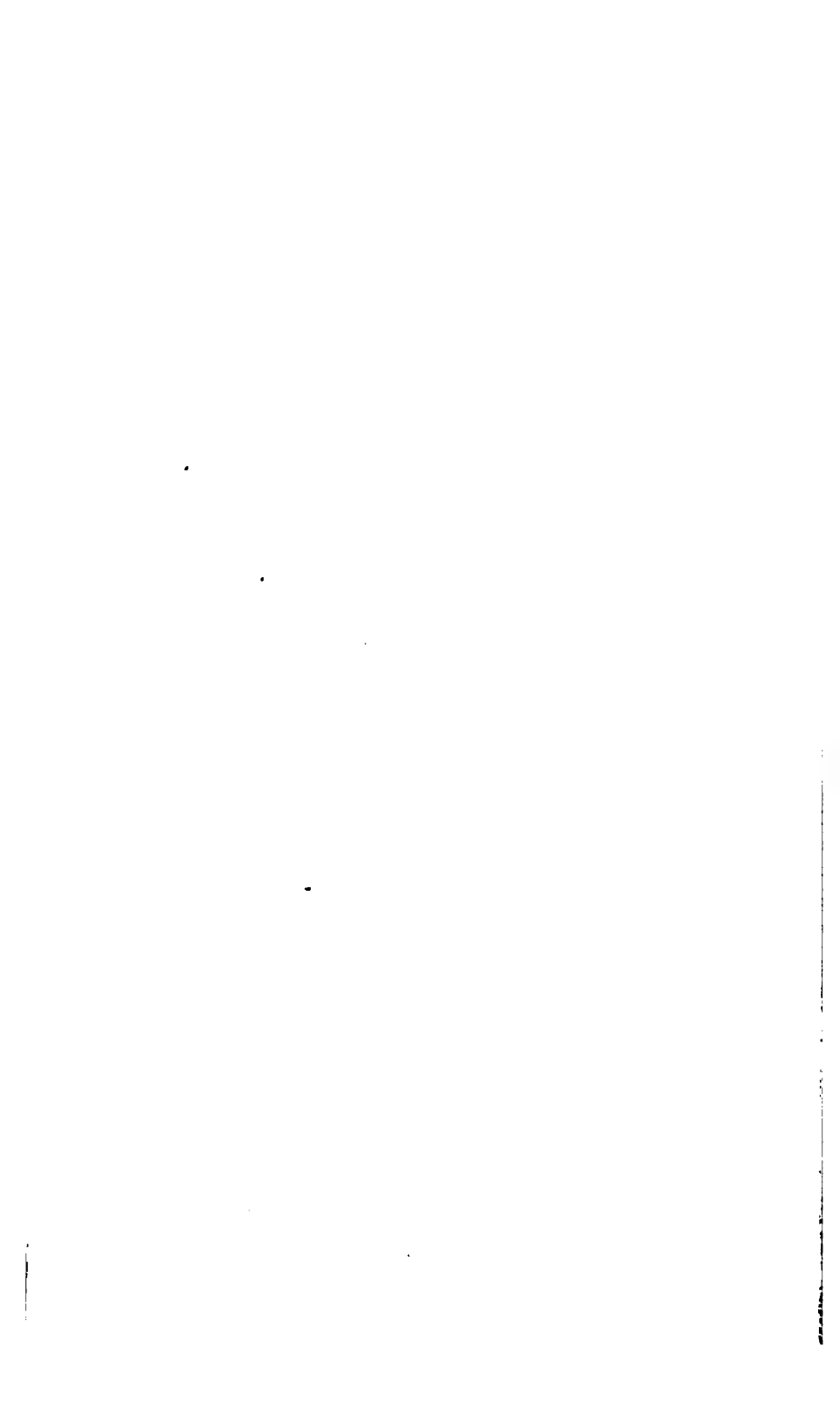
"Ah ! not another word !" I exclaimed with a reproachful look. "Can you speak thus ! Do you believe that the thought of what you might or might not possess, has occupied my mind for an instant ? Nay, did you admit for an instant, the thought that the gift which I wished to bestow upon my cousin, and which now becomes useless, since she has been sacrificed, would diminish my fortune by a moiety ?"

"But still, Matilda"—

"Let us talk about the *corbeille*," I said with a smile, "or rather about subjects of greater importance ; let us talk of our projects for the future. Come, sir, have you ever thought of asking me the part of Paris which I should like to inhabit, or of enquiring in what taste I should prefer our habitation to be furnished and arranged ?"

"I wish I could see you more serious where matters of interest are at stake, Matilda."

"You wish to see me serious ! Well, then"—and the tones of my voice expressed the touching gratitude which I felt—"well, then, let me tell you how *seriously* happy I was when I found yesterday, in my room, that basket of jessamines and heliotropes. Oh ! believe me, this is more serious than any affairs of interest. This is not a question of figures, but a question of feeling—an omen—omen, did I say ? No, I meant a certainty—of happiness in the future. Yes, the heart reveals itself in the veriest trifles, and the man who has shewn so much instinctive tenderness, so much delicacy, on one occasion, can never hereafter belie himself. Those flowers, which were the first token of your feelings, shall always be regarded by me as the symbol of my happiness. Oh ! I give you fair notice, you will find me very exacting. I insist





Alfred G. S. S. S.

I must leave you, My dear!

upon having a basket of these flowers every morning ; but I can assure you that my heart is no sluggard ; it awakes early, and a thought of you will have already preceded the arrival of the lovely *bouquet*."

"On my knees—on my knees I must adore you, Matilda. Who would not devote his whole existence to your happiness ? I must, indeed, be the most base of villains if I did not take God to witness that I will make you the happiest of women."

"Oh ! I believe you, Gontran. I have too much confidence in my own love not to put a blind faith in yours. Why should you deceive me ? With all your brilliant endowments, might you not find a thousand other young girls, who would not, indeed, love you better than I do—I defy them—but who, at least, would possess more fascinating qualities than mine ? I believe, then, what you tell me, Gontran, because I know you to be true-hearted and generous. All that you have just told me of your past life, at the risk of my displeasure, at the risk, perhaps, of losing me, is, in my eyes, an additional proof of your sincerity."

The remainder of our conversation was a series of delightful projects for the future. Our marriage was to take place as soon as the necessary formalities had been completed. The King was to sign the *contrat*, and Gontran was to take his Majesty's directions on the subject. We conversed with extreme pleasure about our future arrangements, our house, and the seasons which we were to pass at Paris, in travels, or in our country residence. Gontran mentioned, as suitable for our establishment, a delightful *hôtel*, situated in the faubourg Saint Honoré, and with a way out into the Champs Elysées, and we agreed to go and look at it with Mademoiselle de Maran. He requested me, also, to take lessons in riding, that we might hereafter make long excursions into the country, and that I might be able to be his companion in the sports of the field, to which he was passionately addicted. We also discussed, as nearly as we could, our probable expenditure, and Gontran, who had always been extravagant himself, spoke to me very seriously on the necessity of a rational economy. "While a bachelor," he said, these economical ideas had never entered his mind ; but now he perceived how requisite they were.

Nothing could be more enchanting than these projects, these cheerful, yet serious anticipations of the future. My early youth in Mademoiselle de Maran's house had been so melancholy a one, I had hitherto lived so completely like a little girl, that I could not believe the happiness which awaited me.

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Two or three days after this conversation, Gontran came one morning to fetch Mademoiselle de Maran and myself, that we might visit the *hôtel* in the faubourg Saint Honoré, of which he

had previously spoken. After a few minutes' conversation, Mademoiselle de Maran said, referring to the house which M. de Lancry was so desirous of obtaining.

"By the bye, don't you mean the *hôtel de Rochegune*?"

"Yes, madame," replied Gontran, "it is a most excellent opportunity. The old Marquis de Rochegune died last year; his son, Abel de Rochegune, had made a great many improvements in the house, intending to inhabit it himself; but as he is very whimsical, he suddenly changed his mind, and now wishes to dispose of the place."

"He is one of the old breed," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "for there never was a greater original, nor a more insupportable old fellow than his father."

"Yet every body spoke of him almost with veneration, madame," said Gontran, looking astonished.

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran with an ironical laugh, "he was a kind of old idiot, a sort of philosopher, a visionary, and a raving philanthropist into the bargain, always sticking his nose into the prisons, and among the galley slaves where he kindly allowed his pockets to be picked by *messieurs* the thieves, and *messieurs* the cut-throats, whom he used to embrace most affectionately, and call *his brothers*, God bless you! a pleasant compliment for his family. And what was still worse, the horrid man would come fresh from all these fine Judas kisses, and in pursuance of a disagreeable habit of his, would always be wanting to embrace you under some trumpery pretext of friendship or cousinhood fifty times removed, just as if you were one of his *dear brothers*, the galley slaves."

"But, madame, they say he founded an alms-house for the poor, on one of his estates."

"I know he did; that was an additional abomination!"

"How so, madame?" said Gontran.

"Why he founded it that he might have the right of tyrannising over a heap of old vagabonds who were thus completely in his subjection. No one can form an idea what that horrid man imagined in order to torture the poor devils. To amuse himself he used to make them eat wolves, rats, and bats; he would beat them to a mummy, and forced them to work at all kinds of things, eighteen hours a-day, keeping for himself, of course, the profits of their labour, so that this so called alms-house was, in fact, a kind of farm, which brought him in a good deal of money, not to mention his reputation for charity which served him for a cloak to conceal all kinds of dirty actions."

Although I had no particular reason to interest myself about M. de Rochegune's memory, I felt indignant at my aunt's spiteful observations; a look of mine explained what I felt to Gontran, who appeared to me to be as much disgusted as myself.

"I believe, madame," he said to my aunt, "you have been incorrectly informed, and that—"

"Not a bit of it; I know what I say. He ought to have been hanged, were one only to judge from his friends; one of our relations—on my sister-in-law's side, thank God—a M. de Mortagne was a disciple of his, and just such a scamp."

"M. de Mortagne!—that old soldier of the Empire!—that traveller no less eccentric than indefatigable!" said Gontran, "why, I did not know he had the honour of being connected with you."

"Oh, yes; we have that honour—at least we *had* it."

"What, madame, is M. de Mortagne dead?" asked Gontran.

"Dead! good God!" I exclaimed anxiously, taking Mademoiselle de Maran's hand.

My aunt gave me a harsh and ironical glance, and said with one of her sharp, shrill laughs—

"Ah! ah! ah; just look at Matilda's emotion. Well, then, yes he *is* dead. Some days ago it was doubtful; but it appears now to be a certain fact."

"Ah! madame, would that you may be deceived!" I said with bitterness.

"Deceived! well then! what great loss would it be if he were dead—that fine hero of the guard-room? Was he not a Jacobin, one of those dangerous mischief-makers who, provided they can make society go forward, as they say in their jargon, care little whether it goes forward up to its knees in blood?"

"Madame!" I exclaimed, "I am but a woman, and think but little of political opinions; but as long as I have no positive proof of the misfortune which you speak of, I shall always look for M. de Mortagne's arrival with the impatience of a grateful heart, for he was a friend of my mother's, madame. When I shall be compelled unhappily, to doubt his death no longer, I shall always entertain a pious respect for his memory."

"Well, then, my dear, you may begin entertaining that fine respect as soon as you like, I tell you; but don't let us talk about that man any more; dead or alive I detest him," said Mademoiselle de Maran in an imperious tone of voice, and she then continued addressing herself to Gontran.

"And what is this son of old Rochegune's like?"

"Nobody knows much what to say about him, madame. He has not been here long; but he made a most remarkable speech—though one by no means in a proper spirit—in the Chamber of Peers. I have occasionally met him in society, where, however, he rarely appears. In Spain he was the hero of some most wonderful adventure, in which the terrible was blended with the romantic. This exploit made a great deal of noise, and he really displayed

all the chivalrous discretion, and the heroic devotion of the old Granada Moors ; he was left for dead, with I do not know how many poniard wounds. Some woman's reputation was at stake, and—but—"said Gontran with a smile, "I cannot tell you this before Mademoiselle Mathilde—I will tell the story some day to Madame de Lancry."

"God bless my soul !" continued Mademoiselle de Maran, "it is a hero of romance then that we are going to see ?"

"Almost, mademoiselle ; but I doubt our seeing him at all. He appeared most readily at first to put himself at our disposal, in order to show us his house ; but suddenly he seemed to change his mind, saying he should, perhaps, be unable to do the honours to us himself, and he then requested me to make his excuses to you."

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE VISIT.

WHEN I heard that we were going to call upon M. de Rochegune, I was excessively annoyed at the thoughts of that intercourse which might, perhaps, result from the visit, between himself and us. It was of him that Madame de Richeville had spoken to me, when she said M. de Mortagne had wished to introduce him to me, in the hopes that I might be induced to accept him for a husband. I now reproached myself for my want of confidence in Gontran at first, as, had I told him the conversation which had taken place between myself and Madame de Richeville, I might have explained to him the kind of aversion I felt at the idea of meeting M. de Rochegune. When we arrived at the latter's house, I was delighted to hear that he was out ; for I should, doubtless, have felt embarrassed at seeing him. His major domo shewed us over the house, and M. de Lancry seemed to be perfectly satisfied. The ground floor, which was intended for reception rooms, was remarkable for the exquisite taste and singular elegance of its arrangement. We particularly noticed one apartment charmingly laid out ; but with bare walls, and neither hangings nor wainscotting, which opened one way into the garden, and another into a hot-house.

"Why is this apartment the only one not fitted up ?" asked Gontran.

"Because the marquis, who had destined this apartment for his intended bride, was desirous, doubtless, that she should fit it up according to her own taste," replied the major domo.

"M. de Rochegune was going to be married, then?" enquired M. de Lancry.

"Probably, *monsieur le comte*; for this was the reason given me by the architect, when I asked him why this apartment was to remain in this state."

"Upon my word, then," said Gontran to me, "M. de Rochegune has displayed great foresight, without meaning it. Do you not think so? I should be delighted if this apartment were to take your fancy; for then we would arrange it according to your taste."

"Certainly it is a delightful room," I replied to M. de Lancry, and I could not help blushing.

While Gontran was attentively examining all the rooms, Madame de Richeville's words recurred to my remembrance, and when M. de Rochegune's major domo spoke of the marriage his master was to have contracted, I reflected that I, perhaps, had been *the intended bride*. We went up to the first floor, and when we had arrived at a waiting-room, the major domo perceived that he had forgotten the key of a room which was used as a library, and went down to fetch it. Giving way to an impulse of pure curiosity, Gontran and ourselves entered a small gallery of modern pictures; at the end of this gallery was a double door of red velvet. One of the leaves of this door was open, and allowed us to perceive another door, which was closed. While examining the pictures, we had gradually drawn near to this door, and Gontran made a movement of surprise, saying—

"There is some one there; I hear voices. I thought M. de Rochegune was out."

Scarcely had M. de Lancry said these words, when some one in the next room said, in a voice that had almost an imploring tone—

"I entreat you, sir, to be silent! We might be heard! There are visitors in the house, and I desired that it might be said I was not at home."

"Why, that is M. de Rochegune's voice!" said Gontran.

"Upon my word this is becoming excessively *piquant*," observed Mademoiselle de Maran, "we are on the eve of discovering some frightful secret; I'll be bound to say the son is no better than the father."

"Let us retire," I said earnestly to M. de Lancry.

We had not time to do so. Another voice exclaimed in reply to M. de Rochegune—

"There is some one there—is there? Well, then, so much the better; all I desire is to be heard. Blessings on the kind hazard which sends me some witnesses."

"Now, you'll see the fuss is about some sum of money which

was confided to old Rochegune, in his quality of a virtuous philanthropist, and the son is denying the deposit with all his might and main," said Mademoiselle de Maran, drawing near to the door.

"Sir—once more—I implore you," said M. de Rochegune, "what are you going to do?"

At this instant the door was violently opened, a man came out and exclaimed when he saw us—

"God be praised, there is somebody there!"

How great was my astonishment! I recognized M. Duval, whom Gontran had pointed out to us at the Opera, when he related the touching conduct of that young man to an old blind mother, from whom by dint of labour, he had concealed his ruin. The other person was M. de Rochegune, whom I had seen in Madame de Richeville's box; he was very tall and of an extremely swarthy complexion. What struck me most, in his physiomy was the stern and melancholy expression of his grey eyes. Gontran made a thousand excuses to M. de Rochegune for our involuntary indiscretion.

"Oh sir! oh ladies!" exclaimed M. Duval with extreme excitement of manner, and addressing himself to us, "heaven itself has sent you here! at least I shall be able to testify all the gratitude I feel towards my benefactor."

"Sir, I implore you," said M. de Rochegune with embarrassment. I looked at my aunt, her features had hitherto worn an expression of sarcastic triumph, but she appeared annoyed at the last words which had passed, and hastily sat down in an arm chair, smiling ironically as she did so.

"Sir," continued M. de Rochegune, addressing himself to M. Duval—"I formally and urgently request that you will be silent."

"Silent!" exclaimed M. Duval, in an explosion of gratitude that was almost furious, "silent! no—no—sir, such deeds do too much honour to human nature, not to be loudly proclaimed."

"Madame," said M. de Rochegune to my aunt, "I am really quite confused—I had desired that no one should be admitted into the house but your party; I had intended to remain in my study, so as not to interfere with your visit to this house, and—"

"And I entered in spite of your orders!" exclaimed M. Duval, "a secret presentiment assured me that you were at home, sir, I had heard that you were expected to set off on some voyage almost immediately; it was only yesterday I discovered, that to you, I was indebted for almost the very existence of my poor old mother, it was absolutely necessary that I should see you—"

"Sir! sir!" again interrupted M. de Rochegune.

"Oh sir, you are not to confer benefits, and hide yourself after having done so," exclaimed M. Duval in his generous anger.

Fortunately these ladies are here, and they shall judge between us. I had been ruined by a bankruptcy. Till then I had lived in ease, and the blow was a terrible one to me ; not so much for my own sake, not perhaps so much for my wife's as for my poor mother's sake, my poor mother who was aged and blind. It was necessary, madame, before all things necessary, that this misfortune should be concealed from her. By dint of labour, my wife and myself succeeded in doing so for some time, but at last our strength grew exhausted, and my dear wife became ill, we were about to die perhaps under our burden, when one day I received under cover a hundred thousand francs, a hundred thousand francs, madame, with a letter which informed me that it was a partial restitution from the bankrupt, by whose failure I had lost four hundred thousand francs—you may conceive my joy, my happiness ; henceforth my wife, my mother, would be beyond the reach of want. To us who had now grown accustomed to labour, which even this God-send did not induce us to interrupt, the sum was almost a fortune. I mentioned everywhere that I was indebted for this unhopd for assistance to the repentance of the villain who had reduced us to beggary. Some persons who were acquainted with the man, doubted the story, and they were right in doing so, for the Marquis de Rochegune whom you see here, was the sole author of that generous action."

"Once more, sir, I implore you to be silent, you are abusing the patience of these ladies," said M. de Rochegune impatiently.

"Come, sir, let's get to the pith of the story," said Mademoiselle de Maran with a harsh voice, and twisting about in her arm chair with a movement of displeasure.

"Sir," gaily exclaimed Gontran, taking M. Duval's hand, "we are all leagued against M. de Rochegune, and in spite of all his protestations, and though we are in his house, we will not go away till you have told us everything."

"That's right, sir," said M. Duval, "I see you are worthy of appreciating such actions. Being uneasy at not knowing the source of this generous assistance, I read the letter again, but the hand writing was unknown to me ; has not Providence itself come to my aid ? One of my friends who resides in the country, and who will soon be at Paris, M. Eloi Sécherin, requested me to procure for him a servant who had lived in a good family."

"Ursula's husband !" I exclaimed.

"Is Madame acquainted then with M. Sécherin ?" said M. Duval to me, with a look of astonishment.

"For heaven's sake go on, my dear sir," said Mademoiselle de Maran.

"Well then, yesterday," continued M. Duval, "a servant came to me, I asked him for a character, he shewed me several, the last had been given him by the Marquis de Rohegune, on opening it I was struck with the hand writing, I ran to fetch the letter I had received, the thing was perfectly clear, sir! the hand writing was the same—precisely the same, you could not mistake it. It would be impossible to describe my joy, my emotion. I asked the servant several particulars about his master. 'Ah, sir,' he replied, 'there never was a better or a more charitable one, he is the very image of his father, who did so much good.' And why are you going to leave him then? I asked. 'Alas! sir, the Marquis is about to set off for a long voyage, and he only retains two old servants, who are to accompany him.' Doubt was now out of the question; I told my wife everything. I came here yesterday, M. de Rohegune was out, I came back in the evening, but he had not returned. At last, this morning, after another vain attempt to see him; and fearing his departure, I came up here in spite of the porter, and was thus enabled to press my benefactor's hands. Oh! he wanted to deny it all at first, but he is too great a novice in falsehood for that."

"Sir," said M. de Rohegune, whose embarrassment increased.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed M. Duval, "you are a novice in falsehood—I tell you your inventions are pitiable; and when in order to put you to confusion, I proposed that you should write for me precisely the same letter as that which I had received with the hundred thousand francs, you dared not do it, sir, for that would have been an unerring proof, answer that if you can. This then, Madame, is what the Marquis has done for me—This is what I am proud to accept, not as a gift but as a loan, for I rely upon my labours for the means of repaying it. This is the good and generous action which I will relate everywhere, but I am not the less pleased, nevertheless, at having once at all events convicted the Marquis of his munificent action before witnesses, perhaps he will not dare to deny it now."

"Yes, sir, I shall deny it, for it concerns me that the real benefactor should be known. Delightful as is your gratitude to me, I must not accept it, for in acting as I have done, I have only obeyed the last wishes of my father," said M. de Rohegune, in a voice full of melancholy and emotion.

"Your father, sir?" exclaimed M. Duval.

"Yes, sir!—I repeat it—I only executed his last wishes."

"But, sir, I had not the honour of your father's acquaintance, and you lost him long before the time when you so generously came to my assistance."

"A few words, sir, will explain what I have said. My father, in his youth, had placed a small sum of money in one of those clubs which are instituted to benefit the last survivor. Shortly before his

death he received about three hundred thousand francs, which proceeded from that source. A scruple on his part, and one of which I can well appreciate all the delicacy, hindered him from availing himself of a sum for which he was indebted to the successive deaths of several of his fellow creatures, and accordingly he put this sum aside to be employed in works of charity. During his life he employed a considerable portion of it in this manner; and when I had the misfortune to lose him, he instructed me to use the rest of the money for the same purpose. I happened to hear, sir, with what a pious energy you had for two years struggled against an adverse fate—I heard how admirable had been your conduct towards your mother, and therefore, sir, as you may see yourself, I have only obeyed the last directions of my father. I had believed that this would remain a secret like so many other of my father's generous actions: chance, however, has ordained it otherwise, and I will own that this gives me the less regret now that I have formed a personal acquaintance with him, whose courageous devotion had so much struck me—”

And so saying, M. de Rohegune took M. Duval's hand with cordiality,—I felt a delicious emotion. I recollected with what a touching gracefulness M. de Lancry had told me at the opera the story of M. Duval, and thus the remembrance of Gontran was charmingly mixed up with all the great and noble reflections that this scene inspired in my heart. I gazed at Gontran with tenderness, and he seemed to me to partake in the admiration with which I had been inspired, both by the benefactor and the object of his bounty. Mademoiselle de Maran had, during this time, smiled more than once in a satirical manner. I recognized her usual maliciousness in the picture she had drawn of M. de Rohegune, who had been one of the most remarkable and respected men of his time, and who had rendered himself illustrious by numberless acts of enlightened philanthropy, and by works which bore the stamp of the greatest and noblest intellect.

“Sir,” said Gontran to M. de Rohegune, in a most amiable manner, “I am rejoiced at the chance which has put it in my power to become acquainted with what I had already been informed of by the world's report: namely that in certain privileged families (and yours, sir, is one of the number) the noblest qualities are hereditary.” Then addressing himself to M. Duval, he added—“Two months ago, sir, at the opera, I had the honour of relating to these ladies your noble conduct, with all the enthusiasm which it naturally inspired, but I did not hope to be one day fortunate enough to tell you yourself in person all the admiration which you so well deserve.”

“It was at the *Siege of Corinth*, was it not, sir?” said M. Duval, with simplicity, “one night, when Madame the Duchesse de Berry

was at the opera, I recollect it very well. It was the first time for two years that myself and my wife had been in a theatre, and it was quite a gala night for us."

"We even remarked, sir, Madame Duval's *béret*," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "it became her amazingly, she looked as pretty as an angel, and had not, I assure you, the least appearance of a person compelled to labour for her bread."

"Perhaps you think, Madame, my wife was dressed with too much elegance for our station," said M. Duval, with an air of wounded pride. "But *then*, Madame, I thought that the sum of money had been merely a restitution, but since I know that it is a loan, believe me I shall abstain from everything in the slightest degree superfluous."

Gontran, who like myself, was much distressed at Mademoiselle de Maran's malicious remark, said to M. de Rochegune, in order, doubtless, to change the subject of conversation—

"By the bye, I had also the pleasure of seeing you, M. de Rochegune, that same night, and I was far from suspecting that you were that mysterious benefactor of whom I was conversing with these ladies.

"Yes, I believe I was at the opera that evening, with the Duchess de Richeville," replied M. de Rochegune, with an air of embarrassment.

I happened at this instant to look up at him, his eyes met mine, and he immediately turned them away.

"Sir," said Mademoiselle de Maran to M. de Rochegune, with a look of good nature, which fore-warned me that something treacherous was coming, "nothing that we see or hear can astonish us, your worthy father had long rendered it a usual thing for everybody to admire his good deeds."

"Madame," said M. de Rochegune, bowing as he spoke, with a kind of painful impatience, whether it was that he disliked mademoiselle de Maran, or that his modesty suffered from the continuance of this scene.

"Excuse me, sir, he was really an admirable man," continued Mademoiselle de Maran. "It was only just now I was telling my niece, that nothing could be more touching than his visits to the prisons, and that the kindness with which he treated the pauper inhabitants of his alms-house, was quite in a *St. Vincent de Paule* fashion, or something very like it."

"My father, Madame, was merely a good man," said M. de Rochegune, in a firm and severe tone of voice, which proved that he was not the dupe of Mademoiselle de Maran's ironical praises. I was pleased to see by the expression of annoyance in Gontran's countenance, that he, like myself, was pained at my aunt's language. But Mademoiselle de Maran's disposition was a too haughty one

ever to give way, and she always insisted, to employ a vulgar expression, upon having *the last word*. Accordingly, taking the arm of M. de Lancry, she said to M. de Rochegune :

"Good bye, sir, it don't signify what you say, a merely good man would never have accomplished that miraculous performance of the *tontine* !\* Yes, sir, that scrupulously chivalrous *tontine* piece of business, would be sufficient in itself to make a whole family illustrious. A hundred thousand *écus* given away in alms ! God bless my soul ! in former times it was only the greatest sinners who indulged themselves in such liberalities—by way of honourable compensation for their former sins probably."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Gontran, hastily interrupting Mademoiselle de Maran, "these ladies have some visits to make, and if you will allow me, I will return at some other time to look at the house."

"The house is quite at your orders, sir," said M. de Rochegune coldly bowing, and scarcely able to restrain the indignation, which my aunt's last words had caused him.

When we were once more seated in the carriage, I could not help saying to Mademoiselle de Maran.

"Ah, madame, how cruelly you behaved !"

"What do you mean with your 'cruelly ?' " she exclaimed with a loud laugh. "Don't talk such nonsense—Do you fancy I believe in all that farce ?"

"What farce ?"

"What farce indeed ! why the whole scene was arranged and got up in expectation of our coming. It is clear enough that that fool Duval was told to come, and kept in readiness to utter those touching exclamations of gratitude, and accordingly he began to chatter away like a magpie, as soon as he knew we were near the door. That old rascal of an *intendant* doubtlessly went to give him due notice, under the pretence of looking for the key of the library."

"Ah ; madame, what an idea !" said Gontran, "and what possible motive could there have been for this ?"

"Why, my poor fellow, it is a very simple calculation ; in the first place, if M. de Rochegune asks you for twenty or thirty thousand francs too much for his house, you will never have the face to haggle with a man who is capable of such noble actions ; not to mention that the very fact of inhabiting a

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\* This is the name by which those clubs are known, to one of which, the father of M. de Rochegune had been indebted for the sum which he wished to employ in acts of charity.— AUTHOR'S NOTE.

house which has witnessed such noble deeds, is sure to bring you good luck, and is worth all the money in itself. I would wager that old Rohegune did still more wonderful things, in order to establish his fine philanthropy, so that he might, I am certain, under that cloak, dabble in all kinds of abominable usuries. They say he used to lend small sums of money at exorbitant interest, and I am inclined to believe it, for he died worth millions! The proof of what I assert is that people with clear consciences don't give away a hundred thousand *écus* in charity. The curate of my parish at Glatigny, who was no fool, always used to say. "*It is only great sinners who give much to the poor!*"—Upon my word, a hundred thousand *écus* in charity! that must have been *the devil's share*, as simple folks say, or, if you prefer, it, the sinking of a capital which had been acquired by all sorts of rascality."

"But madame," impatiently said Gontran, "at least you must own, that this benefaction whatever might be the source of the money, could not have been better placed."

"Certainly, certainly, little Madame Duval was an uncommonly nice woman, upon my word she was, with her rose coloured *béret*. M. de Rohegune was probably of the same opinion, and the hundred thousand francs were paid by him for the *droit du seigneur*—and then the fool of a husband comes to thank him in the bargain!"

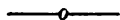
"Ah, madame! what a disgraceful idea!" exclaimed Gontran—"Besides M. de Rohegune is going away in a few days."

"Well, and what then if he is going away? it only proves he is tired of the little woman," said Mademoiselle de Maran with a loud laugh.

"Madame, madame!" said M. de Lancry with a look at me, in order to make my aunt feel the impropriety of such conversation.

I could not describe to you, my friend, the desolating impression left upon my mind, when I heard Mademoiselle de Maran so wickedly scandalize, all that my heart had just been admiring, never had she more odiously betrayed her horror and detestation of all that was either physically or morally beautiful. At this fresh proof of my aunt's implacable maliciousness, my thoughts fell back upon myself and my own position. My distrust of Mademoiselle de Maran became more lively than ever, and yet my blind confidence in Gontran was not in the slightest degree diminished. I could not help remembering what Madame de Richeville had said to me 'Beware of this marriage. He is protected by your aunt, he must therefore be fatal to you!'—I perceived also that the duchess had

not deceived me, in her description of the qualities of M. de Rochegune, whom M. de Mortagne had wished me to marry. I confess that I was troubled for an instant, by the seeming seriousness of these reflections, and, if I may say so, my heart trembled when it perceived that my mind was embarrassed how to answer them. I instinctively looked at Gontran, and the sight of his noble, gentle and honour-breathing countenance re-assured me. It is not mademoiselle de Maran, I said to myself, it is my own heart which has brought about this marriage; and after all, because M. de Rochegune possesses many noble qualities, is it a reason that Gontran should possess none? Was it not Gontran who first related to me that touching action which was so nobly recompensed? Even just now, did he not share in my emotion? These reflections banished the painful impressions to which my aunt's perfidious words had given rise. When we alighted from the carriage, one of Mademoiselle de Maran's servants told her that '*Mademoiselle Ursule*, that is to say *Madame Sécherin*,'—he added correcting himself,—was waiting in the drawing room with her husband. My cousin was arrived then! forgetting Gontran and my aunt, I mounted the staircase with impatient steps, and hastily opened the drawing-room door. It was Ursula indeed—Ursula and her husband.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## M. ET MADAME SÉCHERIN.

"Ursula!"

"Matilda!"

We embraced each other enthusiastically. I had expected to find my poor cousin frightfully altered; but to my great astonishment she looked fresher and prettier than ever, although the expression of her eyes was still a melancholy one, and there was a tinge of sadness in her smile. She introduced me to M. Sécherin, a young man of middle sized stature, with a full and ruddy countenance, the expression of which was decidedly vulgar, though it denoted, at the same time, good humour and frankness. He struck me at first as being one of those men, the want of distinction in whose figure and language we are induced to excuse, by the openness and unaffected good nature of their manners. Nevertheless, I should never have imagined that my cousin, with all those girlish

ideas which we used to discuss together, could resign herself to such a marriage. When I looked at M. Sécherin, the sacrifice which Ursula asserted she had made, appeared a still greater one in my eyes. I felt a deep compassion for her fate, in having been compelled to submit to the imperious determination of her father. I pressed Ursula's hand, as I embraced her ; she understood me, returned the pressure, and cast her eyes up to heaven.

Mademoiselle de Maran now made her appearance with M. de Lancry. Ursula gave me a look which pierced my heart ; she was comparing her husband to Gontran. My cousin introduced M. Sécherin to my aunt, and I expected Mademoiselle de Maran would give full play to her sarcastic disposition. To my great surprise, this was not the case at first ; Mademoiselle de Maran put on her "*good sort of a woman*" manner, and said with the utmost affability to M. Sécherin, in order, no doubt, to put him at his ease—

" Well, sir, so you are going to make Ursula the happiest woman in the world ? You are determined, then, that she shall forget all of us, who love her so well ? Do you know, Monsieur Sécherin, that I, at least, shall become quite jealous of you ? Yes, I most certainly shall ; and I must first warn you of one thing, which is, that here we are all accustomed to speak with the greatest frankness in the world ; we form quite a cosy kind of family party, and you will know us as well in half an hour, as if we had passed our whole lives together. As for me, I am a good sort of old woman, perpetually harping upon one string ; my adoration for these two children, Matilda and Ursula, therefore, you may make up your mind to my tongue's continually going, when they are concerned ; moreover, I am prone to grumbling, sulking, and all kinds of fantastical and crotchety whims, because it is the privilege of old age to be so. And yet I do not know how it is, Monsieur Sécherin, but in spite of all this, people always end by liking me a little."

M. Sécherin was a complete dupe to this pretended good nature. I observed, upon his frank and cordial countenance, the growing confidence which my aunt's words inspired ; his constraint and embarrassment vanished as if by magic, and he joyously exclaimed—

" Upon my word, madame, if you will believe me, I do not think people love you a little ; for my part, I am sure they must love you a great deal. If I must needs be frank, I will confess that I was deucedly afraid of you ; but your reception immediately reassured me."

" Dear me ! afraid of *me*, my excellent Monsieur Sécherin ? What in the name of heaven could have put such a thing into your head !"

Ursula made sign after sign to her husband ; but all in vain, for they were not perceived by him.

"Certainly, madame, I was afraid of you," continued M. Sécherin with still greater confidence, "and well I might be."

"God bless my soul ! Monsieur Sécherin, you quite confuse me."

"Why, madame, my father-in-law, M. D'Orbeval, was incessantly dinning into my ears 'Pray be careful, son-in-law ! Mademoiselle de Maran is a great personage ! If you were unfortunate enough to displease her, it would be all up with you, for she is twenty times more clever than you are, and she knows how to use her cleverness too, I can tell you.' Well, madame, do you know what answer I should make to my father-in-law *now* ? For I can assure you it does not take *me* long to measure my customers—"

Ursula's face was covered with blushes at hearing these vulgar expressions, and Gontran concealed a smile. Mademoiselle de Maran said, however, to Ursula's husband, in a tone incredibly good humoured—

"My dear Monsieur Sécherin, we have promised each other to be frank—haven't we ?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, then, it is not usual, even when alluding to an old woman like me, to talk of '*measuring one's customers*.' It is, decidedly bad taste ! Oh, I will not spare you a bit at first ! I give you fair notice. That is my way."

"Believe me, madame !" exclaimed M. Sécherin with an expression of gratitude, that was really touching, "what you are doing now is an act of perfect generosity ! I thank you for it, from the bottom of my heart. Other people would have laughed at me—you, on the contrary, have the kindness to correct me when I am wrong. How can I help it, madame ; I am nothing but a poor rustic, but little accustomed to the fine manners of the capital."

"Of Paris—Monsieur Sécherin—of Paris ; people don't call it 'the capital,' continued Mademoiselle de Maran with an imperturbable air of seriousness.

"Don't they, indeed, madame ? Dear me, that is curious. And yet our *procureur du roi* and our *sous-préfet* always say *the capital*."

"Very possibly ; the expression is used magisterially and geographically," continued Mademoiselle de Maran, "but never else. You see, my poor Monsieur Sécherin, that I am quite inexorable."

"Go on, go on, madame, pray go on ; I never forget what I have once been told. Well, then, madame, if I had to describe you to my father-in-law *now* I should say to him, 'Mademoiselle de Maran is, doubtless, a great personage, from her position in society ;

but she is a good, worthy little sort of woman at bottom, quite free and easy, and as pleasant and open as a fine day—a woman, in short, who wears her heart pinned upon her sleeve, and whose kindness, perhaps, exceeds even her wit. Now, then, tell me, am I mistaken ?”

“God bless me, my dear Monsieur Sécherin, Lavater was a joke to you ; you are quite a Nostradamus—a second Cagliostro in foresight and infallibility ! There, I am so delighted with the portrait you have drawn of myself, that I will even pass over some expressions you have used.”

“Oh ! pray don’t madame, pray don’t pass them over by any means ; if you do, I give you fair warning, I shall be very angry, indeed.”

“Oh ! pray don’t Monsieur Sécherin, pray don’t, I entreat you,”

“Madame, I repeat I shall be very angry if you do not correct me.”

“Well, then, if you absolutely insist upon it, and in order not to disturb the touching harmony which exists between us, I will just beg you to remark that *free and easy*, and a *heart pinned upon a sleeve*, are a *little vulgar*.”

“Come, then, I will take it for granted, and never say so again. God bless my soul, madame, how good natured you are ! After all, you know I am a good sort of fellow enough ; you must have guessed as much at first sight.”

“Certainly, I saw at first sight what you were, my good Monsieur Sécherin ; you seem to me to be the very best creature in the world, and I really do not think there is a drop of gall in your composition.”

“Gall in me ! no, not more than there is in a pigeon. All I am deficient in is education ; I am well aware of that ; but how can it be helped ? I was brought up in the country, and my father traded on a very small scale ; he laid the foundation of his fortune by buying up the property of emigrants.”

“If he started in business of that description your worthy progenitor could not help getting on in the world,” said Mademoiselle de Maran.

“It happened just so madame.”

“No doubt ; pray go on, Monsieur Sécherin.”

“As for my mother,” continued Mademoiselle de Maran’s unfortunate victim, “as for my mother, she is the best woman in the world, but she will keep wearing her old fashioned round cap and short gown ; she is a housekeeper in the true acceptation of the word, so you may guess that I was not brought up like a Duke. I pottered through a course of study at the college of Tours, and at my father’s death I undertook the

management of his fortune. I found in his old black fir desk an inventory of sixty three thousand seven hundred livres a year in lands and farms, and all this, madame, free from taxes, without reckoning the appurtenances and stock of two factories where I employ five hundred workmen, whose united labour is insufficient to supply the demand. That is the state of things with me, madame."

"Upon my word your position is a magnificent one, M. Sécherin! But we need not be surprised at that, honest people always prosper, and I am sure that your worthy father was indebted for *his* increased prosperity, to his buying up the property of those poor devils of emigrants."

"Madame," said Ursula who was on thorns all this time—"I am afraid these details—"

"Nonsense, Ursula, on the contrary, my dear child, they interest me excessively."

"No doubt, *my little darling*, all these business matters of mine cannot fail to interest this good aunt of yours infinitely."

"Monsieur Sécherin, in pursuance of my system of frankness," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "I will take the liberty of remarking, that *little darling* should be reserved for the hours of your sweetest and most private intimacy—you profane the mysterious charm of such adorable expressions, by thus lavishing them in public."

"And yet, madame, my father always used to call my mother his *little darling*, and my mother used to call him her *little papa*, or else her *great duck*."

"But my good Monsieur Sécherin, pray understand that I do not object to such tender and sweetly simple expressions—as *little darling*, *little papa*, or even *great duck*, themselves, quite the contrary, I can assure you! I am sure I hope that Ursula, with due fidelity to the touching traditions of your family, lavishes these delightful names upon you in private."

"Halloo! what you have told madame, that you call me your great duck, have you?" exclaimed M. Sécherin, turning towards Ursula, and clapping his hands with astonishment.

"Indeed! what Ursula calls you already her great duck, my good Monsieur Sécherin, does she?" exclaimed my aunt.

"Certainly she does, madame, and does not put gloves on for fear of dirtying her fingers, when she calls me so, I can assure you," continued M. Sécherin,

"Ah! madame, can you believe it," exclaimed Ursula, with tears of shame and confusion in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" continued M. Sécherin, "what do you mean? don't you recollect that when I showed you the inventory of our fortune, on the morning but one after our marriage, I gave

you a kiss and said, 'all that belongs to you and your great duck !' and that you returned the kiss, and answered—'yes all that belongs to me and my great duck.' Think for a minute and you must recollect this, it was in the little green room which I use as a study."

It is impossible to form an idea of Ursula's pain and despair at hearing these words. I felt deeply hurt for her, Gontran could not repress a smile, and Mademoiselle de Maran was triumphant. She did not, however, choose to protract this scene too much, and continued immediately.

"Will you be good enough to hold your tongue, Monsieur Sécherin ? you naughty tell-tale you ! Do people ever talk of such things ? Those delicate little blisses should be kept for oneself, they are some of those bewitching and *under the rose* little felicities of marriage, which one gloats over in secret, but must not proclaim publicly ! If Ursula had called you her great duck a thousand times over, she would die sooner than confess it, and she is right. I repeat it again, you *are* are a naughty tell-tale. Oh ! these men, these men, we cannot allow them to read the most charming predilections of our hearts, we cannot betray those predilections to them by the sweetest names, without their immediately going and bawling it out in the street !"

"Well, that is true, madame," said M. Sécherin. "I was wrong, and you are right, as you always are, this is another lesson by which I shall profit. I shall always reserve *little darling* and *great duck* for our two selves, my wife."

"And you will act wisely in so doing. But tell me a little more about these emigrants' property which your worthy father purchased when he was a trader on a small scale, you can't imagine how that interests me. Was there much of this property ?"

"Yes, madame, it belonged partly to the Rochegune family, before the revolution ; but my father sold them back to the old Marquis at the restoration."

My aunt scowled at hearing this name, which had so singularly and frequently recurred in the course of that day.

"Has M. de Rochegune much more property in that province, sir ?" asked Gontran.

"Oh yes, sir, he possesses all the estates as well as all the good qualities of his father. The alms-house for old men, which was founded by the late Marquis, is within half a dozen miles of my house. Ah ! madame," added M. Sécherin, with enthusiasm, and turning towards my aunt, "how much good the late Marquis did in the country, and so little pride with it all ! In a word, madame, just fancy that while he resided at his château de Rochegune, he used to attend mass every Sunday at the old men's alms-house, after mass he dined at their table, went with them

to vespers, supped with them afterwards, and slept in their dormitory; this he invariably did once a week: nor was this all, for when one of the poor died, the Marquis used to follow the coffin to the cemetery. That was a kind way of shewing kindness, was it not, madame?"

"Oh yes, certainly," ironically replied Mademoiselle de Maran. "Dipping in the same dish with those old vagabonds—upon my word I think the idea a charming one."

"Ah! you are quite right, madame," replied M. Sécherin, with simplicity, poor old folks, it warmed the very cockles of their hearts. But this was nothing to what he did besides, madame."

"God bless my soul, can there be anything still more flabbergasting than this trencher fellowship with a parcel of beggars?"

"Yes madame. As I happened to be the largest manufacturer in the district, the marquis had requested me to give these poor devils a little to do; they did it indeed, but how, God only knows! the work was not worth twopence, it was so much raw material lost, for which the late marquis used to pay: and not satisfied with this he invariably repaid me the trifling sums which I gave those poor old men, nominally as the price of their work, so that they imagined they earned by their own labour, the little luxuries which they were thus enabled to procure—"

"Well really now, this *was* delicacy in the superlative degree, indeed!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran. "and it shews good judgment too; for only just fancy, if these worthy vagabonds had happened to find out that this M. de Rochegune took the liberty of bestowing his alms upon them in every possible sort of way, they might have broken out into a revolution at the very least, and have dusted this impertinent marquis's jacket for him nicely, or perhaps they might have taken advantage of some night when he was going to sleep in their dormitory, to give him a precious good bolstering, and one which he certainly would have deserved."

The bitterness with which Mademoiselle de Maran sneered at an action, whose delicacy might perhaps be exaggerated, but which at least revealed the most touching kindness of disposition; proved how irritated she was at seeing the lie so brilliantly given to her calumnies. Gontran shared in my emotion, and Ursula with her fixed gaze seemed absorbed in profound and painful reflections.

M. de Lancry said to M. Sécherin.

"I agree with you sir, in admiration of M. de Rochegune's conduct. Is this alms-house still kept up?"

"It is, sir, and the present marquis follows exactly the example of his father. When he returned from his travels, he

passed six months at his château, and like his father he went once a week to dine and sleep at the alms-house ; it is no wonder then that, like his father, he is adored by every one in the district."

"And he assuredly deserves it *just as much as his father did*," said Mademoiselle de Maran, with bitterness. "And pray does he put on a pauper's cap and smock frock too, on those delightful days."

"No, madame, he wears his usual dress. Oh ! he does that, as he does everything else, simply and without ostentation. It is his nature, he inherits it from his father. It is just the same with his courage, he is as brave as a lion. Just to give you an idea of it, some seven or eight years ago, when he was not above twenty, he and an odd sort of fellow, whose name was the Count de Mortagne, and who had been an intimate friend of the late Marquis, performed an exploit, before which, perhaps, even the most intrepid men would have recoiled."

"My aunt's ill humour increased at hearing M. de Mortagne's name."

"Did you know M. de Mortagne ?" I said eagerly to M. Sécherin.

"Yes, mademoiselle, he was an original who had been to the end of the world, formerly a trooper in the *grande armée*, and with a beard like a pioneer's ; he used to come very often and see us at the factory, and he was a great favourite of my poor father's. To return, however, to my story, one day he and the young de Rochegune were out with a pack of harriers, they had, consequently, no guns, or any other arms but the whips they carried ; the hare came out of the *forêt* de Rochegune, and took to the level country. It was in the middle of winter, they found a shepherd lying in a field, covered with blood and half dead."

"That will do, that will do," impatiently exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran. "I easily see what it all was, some mad dog or wolf which had bitten the sheep and the shepherd, and which these two courageous Rolands valiantly put to death. Well, well, it was a superb action, but I have had quite enough of it."

"No, madame, it was—"

"That will do, that will do, my dear Monsieur Sécherin. pray spare us all these romantic stories, they are doubtless very beautiful, but so *frightful* that the remembrance of them to-night would give me the night-mare. Besides, I can see by Ursula's eyes that she is dying with impatience to go and gossip with Matilda."

I got up, took my cousin by the hand and went with her to my own apartments, leaving M. Sécherin with my aunt and Gontran.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE APOWAL.

URSULA had been deeply and cruelly humiliated ; she had not only suffered from the vulgarity of her husband but also by the revelation of the ridiculously familiar expressions, which he had used towards her, a few days after their marriage, Mademoiselle de Maran had succeeded even beyond her wishes ; her treacherously feigned good nature, which had at the very outset thrown Ursula's husband off his guard, had placed M. Sécherin in a light that was almost grotesque, and chance had done the rest.

I think that now, without anticipating events too much, I may induce you to remark that from my very childhood, Mademoiselle de Maran had been actuated by one predominant intention, that of exciting the jealousy and envy of Ursula against myself ; my aunt was in fact desirous of turning sooner or later, into an implacable enemy her whom I loved with tenderness the most sincere. When I was a child, she had represented my intellect and cleverness as far superior to Ursula's, when I had reached the years of girlhood, it was my beauty, it was my fortune which was totally to eclipse my cousin, and to wind up all she had now exerted herself to enhance the distinction, the elegance, the position in society, and the birth of Gontran who was my intended husband, by drawing out, with an infernal malice the candid confidences of M. Sécherin. Alas ! I believe it, had it not been for my aunt's incessant perseverance, my cousin would not have so often or so bitterly compared my position with her own ; she would not have envied me the few advantages I might possess, and we should have lived without rivalry and without jealousy. I shall always believe that Ursula's heart was, originally, a good and generous one, and that it was my aunt's insinuations that caused all the mischief, which my former friend afterwards inflicted upon me.

I took Ursula up to my own room. I entertained the most complete and the most blind confidence in her frankness, I looked upon her as a victim, and I recalled to mind that letter written so lugubriously and mournfully which she had sent me, so that I could not account for the singular familiarity of her expressions towards her husband so soon after a marriage, her despair at the prospect of which had even induced her to think of suicide. Had I for an instant suspected Ursula of falsity, had I believed her capable of contracting a union, not only with no feelings of pleasure, but prompted by sordid calculations, I should have understood the strange contradiction between my cousin's words and her letter, but, I repeat it, my faith in her was profound and I accordingly awaited with anxiety the explanation of this mystery. When she entered my room, Ursula threw herself into an arm chair, and hid her face in her two hands without addressing a word to me.

"Ursula, my friend, my sister!" I exclaimed, kneeling before her and taking her two hands in my own.

"Leave me, leave me," she replied, endeavouring to disengage herself and smiling, with bitterness, through her tears. "Why do you use these words of tenderness? they are not, they cannot be any longer your real sentiments."

"Ah! Ursula, this is cruel—what have I done to you!—what have I said to you? good God! why do you receive me thus after so long an absence?"

"I do not accuse your heart, Matilda; it is a good and a generous one; but its very generosity causes it to hold in horror everything that is false and deceitful. Leave me, then—leave me, and do not think yourself obliged to put on the appearance of loving me any longer."

"Ursula, what are you saying?"

"Do I not know that you despise me?" added the unhappy girl bursting into tears. She then rose from her seat, and went to the window, in order to wipe her eyes.

I had remained thunderstruck, unable to comprehend what Ursula had said. I now ran up to her and exclaimed—

"For God's sake explain yourself; what can you mean? Why do you insist upon it that I must despise you?"

"Why?—Matilda, can you ask me why? Good God! a fortnight ago I wrote you a despairing letter—a letter which painted the fearful desolation of my heart; you are moved by my despair; you compassionate your friend, you weep over her sacrifice, over her lost illusions, and not a moment ago, you heard it said that this very girl, who for an instant had seen no other refuge from an odious futurity but death, that this very girl three days after that detested marriage, lavishes names the most ridiculously familiar upon her husband. Once more, Matilda, I tell you, you despise

me, or else you conceal that feeling, and compassionate me. Compassion ! I will not have it—I prefer contempt—I prefer hatred—I prefer indifference : but compassion !—oh ! never, never !”

And placing her handkerchief to her mouth, Ursula stifled the sobs which she was unable to restrain.

“ You are mad, Ursula ! you cannot mean what you say—remember my letter ! Do I not feel your tears dropping upon my cheeks !” I said embracing her—“ Do I not see, alas ! that you are very, very unhappy ? What difference, after all, can a falsehood of your husband’s make in me ?”

“ A falsehood ! no, it is not a falsehood, Matilda, no—I really really did use those ridiculously familiar words—do you hear ? I *did* use them.”

“ You *did* use them, Ursula ?”

“ Yes, yes,—so leave me, you see very well I am the most false and dissembling of creatures. I feign despair to excite pity, while in fact I am enchanted with this marriage ; after all, my husband is so rich—Oh ! shame ! oh, infamy !”

And Ursula pressed her forehead violently with her two hands.

“ No, there is no shame, there is no infamy,” I exclaimed. “ there is some mystery here which I do not understand. And after all what do I care for some few words that are passed ; you suffer, you weep, well then I will suffer, I will weep with you. Look at my tears, oh ! my sister, feel how my poor heart beats—Say, say now, do you think this is contempt or pity ?”

“ Well then, no, no, I believe you, Matilda, forgive me, oh, forgive me, for having dared to doubt your heart even for an instant. But I had, and must have still, so many prejudices to destroy in your mind.”

“ Not one—I tell you.”

“ Then listen to me, my sister, my tender sister ; your tears, your affection, wring my secret from me. Just now I was determined to tell you nothing. I was determined to see you no more. for to live with you, and to be, by you, suspected of deceit, oh ! that seemed to me impossible.”

“ Poor Ursula ! come then, do I not deserve your confidence ?”

“ Yes, oh, yes ! and you alone, as God is my witness, listen then. This marriage was a source of such despair to me, that to the last moment, in spite of myself, I believed some unforeseen event would prevent it. Yes—I was like those condemned prisoners who know they are to die, that there is no pardon for them, and who yet cannot help expecting that pardon impossible as it is. It was a last instinct of happiness which struggled in my breast.”

“ Ursula—Ursula—your words are frightful—How you must have suffered, good God !”

“ I obeyed my father—I was determined to render it impossible

for you to consummate the generous sacrifice which you had proposed to me. My fate being irrevocably fixed, I had but two alternatives—death.—”

“Ursula—Ursula—do not talk thus, you terrify me.”

“Death, or an existence hopelessly and unceasingly wretched. For a moment I remained without force under this blow, under this prospect of a fatal futurity! yet, before resigning myself wholly to despair, I asked myself what caused the aversion which I entertained for my husband, I assured myself that it was the vulgarity of his manners, his defective education, for I believe his heart to be good.”

“Oh! without a doubt, Ursula, believe it, believe it, he is a good and a generous man. Did you not see with what sensibility he talked of M. de Rochegune's deeds of charity? And, after all, the world will soon polish his language and his manners.”

“Well then, I said to myself: this vulgar language offends me, those almost coarse familiarities disgust me. My life is to be passed henceforth in the company of this man, and I must renounce all the bright ideas of my girlhood. Henceforth my life must be a totally different one. Courage then, all is over—all,” and Ursula's voice was choked by tears. “It is the natural and habitual delicacy,” she continued, “of my thoughts and my instincts that renders me so unhappy. Well then, since I cannot elevate my husband to my own level, I will degrade myself to *his*—yes, I will use this language which disgusts me, I will imitate those manners at which I shudder with repugnance. Matilda! Matilda! what I said, I did, I flattered this man, as he wished to be flattered. I pretended to love him, as he wished to be loved, and I repeated, blushing with humiliation and shame while I did so, the ludicrously familiar expressions which *he* employed. Oh! my sister, my sister, you can never know what I suffered during the week of trials to which I had condemned myself; you can never know all that there is of frightful in that profanation of one's self—in that lie of the lips, at which the heart revolts. Oh! what tears I swallowed in secret, while I played that melancholy and bitter farce. But now I can do it no more, my anguish is too intense—No I can do it no more. Ah! sooner than go on in that course of degradation and falsehood, sooner die—sooner die a thousand deaths!”

Ursula spoke in a tone so harrowing, so despairing, her look was wild and her features so convulsed, that she terrified me. I now understood her conduct, and I was struck with the courage which I must have possessed to have attempted only what she had

“Courage, courage, my sister,” I said to her, “only listen to my advice. You are deceiving yourself I think, in endeavouring to degrade yourself to your husband's level. His heart is a generous

one, he loves you with idolatry, try then to raise him to your own elevation. Did you not perceive just now, how eagerly he received Mademoiselle de Maran's observations? Imagine then what an authority *yours* would possess over him. Ursula, oh my sister! think of this. Doubtless I should have desired a different marriage for you, but then this one has actually taken place. Do not then reject the chances of happiness which even this union holds out to you."

"Happiness, Matilda, happiness for me? oh, never."

"Yes, yes, happiness. Your husband is kind, frank and honourable; he is rich and he dotes upon you. He is not remarkably handsome, his manners and his language may be deficient in elegance, what then, is all this wholly irreparable? Oh, believe me he will soon learn, a good example is everything. And he will have such a charming model to study in you. And then would you like us to assist you?—yes, to make this education an easier task for you," I said with a smile, "would you like us to come and pay you a visit next summer? If you do not intend to take a house at Paris, just yet, you shall come to us. We have now a house quite large enough to enable us to offer you a room. Well, what do you say to my project?"

"I say you are still, as always, the best of friends, the tenderest of sisters," said Ursula, embracing me with enthusiasm. "I say that when with you I forget my misery, and that you have the gift of invariably causing me to hope. But, alas! it will be difficult, Matilda, *now* to re-animate my illusions."

"I do not wish to restore illusions, I only wish you to believe in realities. You shall see your husband in a year. Then your love will have metamorphosed him."

"Only think how selfish we are rendered by sorrow," said Ursula. "I say nothing to you about your own happiness, you at least must be so happy."

"Oh, yes, I am now, especially as you are here to share that happiness. Indeed, Ursula, if I knew you were without sorrows, I could not conceive any felicity equal to mine. Gontran is so kind, so devoted, his heart is so noble, his disposition so exalted, and then he understands me so well. Oh, I feel it here—in the security of my heart, it is a happiness to finish but with existence. My confidence in him is immovable, and death alone could disturb it. Could even death do it? No, no, when love is like ours, when happiness is so intense as mine, one does not survive, one dies the first. No, nothing in the world could change my conviction that I shall be the happiest of women, and that my happiness will last during my whole life, or rather during the whole of Gontran's."

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Even now, my friend, though those presentiments of my heart have been cruelly, very cruelly deceived, I can remember that the confidence which I then felt in a futurity of happiness, was a blind and absolute one.

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A week after Ursula's arrival, there was to be an evening assembly of all our family for the signature of my marriage articles with M. de Lancry. Mademoiselle de Maran had obtained a promise from the mayor of our *arrondissement*, to marry us that evening after the above ceremony, so that we might escape all vulgar curiosity.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE LETTER.

On the morning of the day when the marriage articles were to be signed, I was awakened, as usual, by Blondeau, who brought me the basket of heliotripes and jessamines, which Gontran had sent me regularly every morning. I have always attached an extreme importance to what is vulgarly called *little things*. Delicate attentions, when persisted in, prove that the mind is constantly occupied by one thought, and the opportunities afforded of proving the heart's devotion, by some dazzling exploit, are so rare that it is better to coin that devotion into *small change*, if I may be permitted such an expression. Those who reserve themselves completely for the chance occurrence of some extraordinary circumstance, appear to tell you—"*drown yourself, throw yourself into the midst of a furnace, and then you shall know the value of my love.*" Fatalist as I was in all matters of the heart, this basket of flowers which arrived every morning, possessed an immense significance in my eyes. With it was linked the remembrance of Gontran's first avowal of affection, and I felt unspeakable joy in the consciousness that henceforth every day of mine would commence by a thought of him, which would come to me in the midst of my favourite flowers. I went very early to church with Madame Blondeau. As the moment drew near when I was to become Gontran's, I felt more than ever the irresistible necessity of praying to and praising God, and of placing a futurity, which promised so much happiness, under the protection of heaven and of my sainted mother, who was there. I experienced a serene, confiding, and serious joy, and often, during the day, my eyes would spontaneously

fill with tears of pleasure. These were dreamy, involuntary emotions, which always terminated by impetuous bursts of ineffable and pious gratitude. About four o'clock, Mademoiselle de Maran sent for me into her room, where I had not been for a very long time. I cannot describe my feelings at finding myself once more in that apartment, which recalled all the cruel scenes I had gone through in my childhood. Nothing was changed there, there was the same crucifix, the same coloured windows, the red lacquer desk, and, in their old glass cases, the ancestors of Felix, who would, doubtless, soon rejoin them. Mademoiselle de Maran was sitting at her desk, and I saw, placed before her, a jewel case, a portfolio, and a medallion, at which my aunt was gazing with so much attention, that she did not perceive my entrance. Her features, always so contemptuous, wore, at that minute, an expression of stern melancholy, which I had never observed in them before. Her thin lips were no longer distorted into that implacable, ironical smile, which rendered her so formidable, but she seemed absorbed in anxious and painful reflections.

I hesitated to speak to her. As I leant against the chimney-piece, I happened to move, though very slightly, a lamp which was upon it. Mademoiselle de Maran turned round with a quick movement of the head.

"Who is there?" she exclaimed. Seeing who it was, she let the medallion, which she was holding in her hand, drop down to its former place, and remained for a minute in a silent reverie.

"We are going to part, Matilda," she at last said to me, and her voice had a tone of gentleness which struck me mute with surprise. "Your early youth was not a happy one, was it? It will always be with bitterness that you will reflect upon the time which you spent with me."

"Madame."

"Oh! I know it must be so, I know it very well," she continued in a slow voice, and as if she were talking to herself. "You have often been treated harshly and angrily by me. I have not been to you what I ought to have been—No, I know it very well. This is doubtless the reason that I feel a kind of sorrow at parting with you, your youth and beauty gave at least a little animation to this house. I am very old, and it is melancholy at my age to be left alone, to wait for one's last day with only a dog for a companion; and then to die in solitude, with none to mourn, none to regret me."

After a few moments of gloomy silence, she continued with gentleness:

"Matilda, be generous, do not leave my house with a feeling of animosity against me, that would make my solitude a still more painful one."

Mademoiselle de Maran must have been sincere in speaking to me thus. The most depraved dispositions are not proof against such occasional re-actions. Besides, her emotion betrayed itself in the expression of her features, in the very tone of her voice. She had no interest in acting such a comedy to me, and I was deeply touched at this proof of interest in myself, which was the only one my aunt had ever exhibited. I had been more pleased than moved by her consent to my union with Gontran. I knew, that strictly speaking, I might have done without her approbation, and I felt, without any exaggerated vanity, that my aunt ought to be well satisfied with having been enabled, even while securing my happiness, to bestow my hand upon the nephew of one of her own intimate friends; but, nevertheless, upon this occasion, the affectionate regrets which Mademoiselle de Maran betrayed towards me, touched me passionately. I took her hand, raised it to my lips, and kissed it, *this time*, at least, with a veneration that had something of tenderness in it. Her head was bent down, and I could only see her forehead. She suddenly raised herself by a quick movement, and opened her arms to me, as she did so. To my great astonishment her eyes were moistened by two tears, the only ones which I had ever seen Mademoiselle de Maran shed. I knelt down before her. She placed her two hands gently upon my shoulders, and said to me, with a look in which I could trace a feeling of tender interest.

"Never have you complained—never have you felt the sweetness of a mother's caress; up to the present moment I have either tormented you abominably, or flattered you with fatal exaggeration. I have done wrong, and now I am in despair for it. What more can I say to you? I shall regret it till the end of my life, which, alas! is not far distant. Fortunately your good disposition has prevailed, that at least will be one reproach the less which I shall have to make myself, and God knows, I have enough besides. Believe me, my dear girl, my regrets are so poignant, that if it were still time, I would—I would—but no—no—and yet—"

Without finishing her sentence, my aunt again bent down her head, as if some struggle between her wish to speak, and some other influence, were at work within her. I was terrified, in spite of myself, as though my future life depended upon the secret which my aunt hesitated to tell me. Mademoiselle de Maran, desirous, perhaps, to confirm her good resolution, by asking me for fresh words of tenderness, said to me—"You detest me less than formerly, do you not?"

"Oh! aunt, I have just learnt to love you, all is forgotten," and I pressed her two hands in mine, with a gush of tenderness.

"Well, it does one good, much good, to hear this said to one. And if I did you a great service—a service which, perhaps, would

secure the happiness of your whole existence, would you love me dearly? Would you tell me often, in your voice of sweetness and emotion—'I love you dearly?'—you look at me with astonishment, do answer me. I have been always feared or detested, except by your father, my own excellent brother. Ah! *he* did love me. But then I had never been kind or devoted to any one but him—yes, I loved *him* so much, so much, that I thought I had a right to hate everybody else, and then, doubtless, one has in oneself a greater or less natural quantity of kindness; for my part I had very little, and all I had I concentrated upon your father. I know not why, at this minute, your voice, your accent touches me, and arouses in my breast something, which, if it be not kindness, is at least compassion. So tell me once more that you would dearly love, love with all the energies of your heart, a friend who would stop you at the very edge of a precipice down which you were about to fall. Answer me—answer me—Would you devote your life to such a friend?"

Mademoiselle de Maran uttered these last words with a kind of nervous impatience, which proved the violence of the struggle taking place within her. Without understanding my aunt's meaning, I threw myself into her arms, in an agony of apprehension.

"Oh! have pity upon me!" I exclaimed. "I know not what misfortune menaces me, but if there be one, oh! speak—speak. You are my father's sister. I am alone—alone—I have but you in the world. Who will enlighten me if it be not you? Oh! speak, in pity speak! A misfortune do you say? but what can it be? Gontran loves me, I love him as woman only can love, Ursula is my tenderest friend, can I make my entrance into the world under more fortunate auspices? You yourself, at this minute, are speaking to me with tenderness, and a few words of yours have effaced for ever all the painful memories of my childhood. If any hidden misfortune *does* threaten my destiny, oh! tell it me—in pity tell it me."

"Unhappy girl! some voice, though I know not whence it comes, warns me that it would be a fearful crime to leave you in your present error, and that sooner or later the justice of God or man would overtake me!" exclaimed my aunt.

The feeling to which she was giving way was so generous a one, her emotion sprang from such a noble source, that for an instant her countenance was almost touchingly beautiful. I was listening to her in unspeakable anguish, when Servien knocked at the door, and came in carrying a letter upon a silver waiter. My heart misgave me fearfully, a sinister presentiment warned me that the fatal hazard which had interrupted Mademoiselle de Maran, was about to conceal for ever from my eyes, the mystery that she was on the point of divulging to me.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed my aunt, with an impatience that had in it something almost painful.

"A letter, madame," said Servien, holding out the waiter.

Mademoiselle de Maran took it hastily, and said—

"Leave us."

I breathed again more freely, I believed that my aunt would continue our conversation, for the expression of her countenance was unchanged, and she even appeared so pre-occupied that she threw the letter upon her desk without breaking the seal. By some fatality the direction was turned uppermost before my aunt, the hand-writing struck her, she took the letter and opened it hastily.

All my hopes vanished: the letter seemed to have the effect of a thunderbolt upon her, her features assumed by degrees their habitual expression of irony and harshness, and her eyebrows, which frowned sternly, gave her a more detestable aspect than ever. For a minute she remained like one stupified, and muttered while she crumpled the letter with rage—

"And I, who was just now going to—Why, what the deuce can have been the matter with me? I fancy I must have been mad—the girl had bewitched me. Here was I making a fool of myself with all kinds of affectionate absurdities, while he—Ah! may hell confound him! luckily I have time enough."

These words of my aunt, during the utterance of which she had made several long and meditative pauses, terrified me.

"Madame," I said to her, trembling; "Just now you were about to make a most important confession to me."

"Just now, I was a fool, an idiot, do you hear?" she replied in a bitter and angry tone. "Ha, ha, ha, and this girl believed it all, and she did not see I was laughing at her, with all my fine sensibility. I am remarkably sensitive indeed."

"I did believe in your emotion, madame. Yes you were moved. It is in vain to deny it, I saw tears in your eyes. Ah, madame, in the name of those tears whose source was, perhaps the memory of my father, do not leave me a prey to painful uneasiness! Give way to that generous sentiment which but a few minutes ago opened your arms to me. It would be too cruel, madame, to have sown doubt and distrust in my heart, the more cruel, since that doubt and that distrust may fix itself upon everything, and arouse in my bosom a vague suspicion of those I love most dearly in the world."

"Indeed, that is your opinion, is it? Well then, so much the better, it will be a nice little occupation for you to try and guess the word of this enigma. You have no idea how amusing it will be, and I promise I will tell you if you guess right."

"Madame," I exclaimed, indignant at my aunt's cold malice "You have said it yourself, the justice of God or man would overtake you if—"

"Ha, ha, ha," exclaimed my aunt, interrupting me with one of her bursts of sarcastic laughter. "What are you thinking about with your justice of God or man? Do you mean to threaten me with being prosecuted by the Attorney-General, or excommunicated by the Pope? Can't you see then that I was only joking? What on earth can be more natural? one is so merry on a wedding-day. I suppose you will tell me next about my two tears. Well then, my good girl, I will let you into a secret which may be of use to you some day, when you want to melt Gontran's heart, during one of those little domestic discussions which *will* happen in the happiest and best regulated families. Just look here, one tiny grain of snuff in each eye, and you will weep like a Magdalen. And you know eyes so beautiful as your own, must be irresistible when they weep."

"But, madame,"—

"Ah! I forgot, I have a few things here which your mother in her will directed me to deliver up to you on the day of your marriage; that is to say when the marriage should have been completed. I was thinking of giving them to you *now*—but I have changed my mind—you shall have them this evening, after the ceremony," and with these words my aunt got up and locked her desk.

"Ah, madame, grant me that at least—I said to her, "you will leave me very sad, very frightened at your cruel silence. Those last proofs of my mother's tenderness will at least console me."

"It is impossible," replied Mademoiselle de Maran—"the clause in the will is a formal one. When you are once married, I will deliver up all the things to you.—God bless my soul, it is already five o'clock—and I am not dressed! Leave me my dear girl."

While thus speaking my aunt rang for one of her maids, who, as she came in informed her that a package had just been brought to the drawing-room for me, from the Viscount de Lancry.

"Make haste—it must be your *corbeille*," said my aunt—"and judging from Gontran's taste, it is no doubt both a charming and magnificent one."

I was grieved to the heart when I left Mademoiselle de Maran's room. When I thought of the secret which she had been going to confide to me, for the second time, my mind recurred, in spite of myself to what I had been told by the Duchess de Richeville.—And yet—I did not in the least distrust Gontran, for had he not himself anticipated my suspicions by confessing to me the errors which might be imputed to him? and moreover I loved him passionately, and my faith in him was profound. All the security and enchantment which the future promised were promised only, because that

future was to depend upon him. It was just the same with Ursula's friendship ; which I believed to be as devoted and sincere, as were the feelings which I myself experienced towards her.

The cruel uneasiness, therefore, with which Mademoiselle de Maran had inoculated my heart, hovered, as it were, over the two only affections which I possessed, and seemed to menace both, without actually attacking either.

I found in the drawing-room the *corbeille* which had been sent to me by M. de Lancry. It justified my aunt's expectations, for it was impossible to see anything more elegant and more rich ; diamonds, jewels, lace, cashmere shawls, dresses, etc—all of the most exquisite taste were there in profusion. But I was too sad to enjoy all these wondrous things, and I should hardly have looked at them, had they not been chosen by Gontran. However, after endless guesses at the mystery which Mademoiselle de Maran was concealing from me, I ended by becoming convinced, that her emotion, which I had at first believed to be sincere, was nothing less than real, and that her sole object had been to torment me and to *leave a sting in her farewell*.

The presence of Gontran—who came a little before the hour fixed for the signature of the marriage articles—and his expressions of tenderness completely re-assured me.

At nine o'clock, the members of my family and of Gontran's were assembled in the great drawing-room of the Hôtel de Maran. I was placed between my aunt and the Duke de Versac. The notary had arrived. Almost at the same instant, we were startled by a violent cracking of whips, and the loud, rumbling noise of a carriage, which was driven into the yard at the full speed of its horses.

I looked at my aunt ; her face became livid.

The next minute M. de Mortagne appeared at the drawing-room door.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### M. DE MORTAGNE.

HAD it not been for the strongly marked features which gave so characteristic an expression to M. de Mortagne's countenance, it would have been impossible to recognize him. His beard and hair had become as white as snow, while his wrinkled forehead, his hollow and lustreless eyes, and his deeply furrowed cheeks, were evidences of long and cruel sufferings, his dress was as careless as usual. It was a strange contrast, that almost sinister apparition, in the

midst of a drawing-room glittering with gold and light, and filled with men and women exquisitely dressed. The assembly remained at first mute with astonishment. M. de Mortagne came straight to me, I got up, he took my hands and looked at me for some minutes ; the fierce expression of his features became softened, he kissed me tenderly on the forehead and said to me.

"At last I am here ! God grant that it may not be too late"—Then gazing at me attentively, he added—"It is her mother again—the very image of her poor mother. Ah ! I can account well now for the monster's hatred."

When the first astounding effect had in some degree passed away Mademoiselle de Maran recovered her habitual audacity and resolutely exclaimed—

"What business have you here, sir ?" Without answering her M. de Mortagne exclaimed in a voice of thunder.

"I am come here to accuse and to convict three persons of the most infamous machinations, and the most mercenary baseness ! Those three persons are you, Mademoiselle de Maran ! you, Monsieur d'Orbeval ! and you, Monsieur de Versac !"

My aunt moved restlessly in her arm chair ; M. d'Orbeval turned pale with terror, and M. de Versac got up, but his nephew hastily exclaimed.

"Monsieur de Mortagne !—beware. The Duke de Versac is my uncle—and to insult *him* is to insult *me*."

"Your turn will come, Monsieur de Lancry, but not yet ; let us deal first with causes, and then with the effects," coldly replied M. de Mortagne.

I seized Gontran's hand and whispered to him imploringly.

"What does it signify to you ? I love you—do not be enraged with M. de Mortagne, he was the only protector of my childhood."

M. de Mortagne continued.

"I am prepared for vociferations, and threats—nothing can be simpler ; whoever prevents my speaking, has reason to dread my words."

"We only dread your insults, sir,"—exclaimed my guardian.

"When I have said what I have got to say, I shall be at the orders of all who may consider themselves insulted."

"Really this is insupportable tyranny, do you think we are going to put up with your Jack the Giant-killer's airs here ?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran.

"It is certainly intolerable," said M. de Versac. "One cannot conceive such ruffianism in a man of good family."

"It's a clear case of slander and defamation," added my guardian.

"You are afraid then of my revelations, since you attempt to drown my voice ?" exclaimed M. de Mortagne, "you are afraid

then that I should dissuade this unfortunate girl from the marriage you would force her into?"

"Sir," exclaimed Gontran, "it is myself now, myself, do you hear? who summon you to speak out—and to speak out without reserve—however happy and honoured I should be by a union with Mademoiselle Mathilde, I would this instant renounce my dearest hopes, if she retained the slightest doubt of"—

It was now my turn to interrupt M. de Lancry, and I said to M. de Mortagne—"I doubt not, sir, that your conduct is dictated by the interest which you feel in me—I have not forgotten your kindness in former years, but, I implore you, do not say another word—Nothing in the world can change my resolution."

"But I, Mademoiselle, will change mine," exclaimed Gontran. "Yes, cruelly as I may suffer from doing so, I will resign your hand if this man does not instantly explain himself."

"That is just what I want to do," said M. de Mortagne.

"This is really absurd," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, who was pale with rage, "have none of you any blood in your veins, that you suffer yourselves to be insulted thus by a ruffian like this who seems to have escaped from *Bicêtre*?"

"You mean escaped from the dungeons of *Venice*, where you have kept me for the last eight years through your most execrable machinations?" thundered out M. de Mortagne, roughly seizing Mademoiselle de Maran's arm, and shaking her with fury.

"He will murder me, the wretch is capable of anything," exclaimed my aunt.

"And what is there, infernal creature, of which *you* are incapable? Have I not suffered a thousand deaths from your treachery? Look at my hair grown white, look at my forehead furrowed by sufferings. Eight years of torture—do you hear fiend? and I will be revenged though I pursue you to the grave—and even now I know not why I do not this very instant rid the world of such a monster"—added M. de Mortagne, throwing back Mademoiselle de Maran into her arm chair.

This scene had been so abrupt, the accusation which M. de Mortagne brought against my aunt seemed such an extraordinary one, that all present remained for a moment petrified with stupefaction and terror. Mademoiselle de Maran, dreaded as she was, was still sufficiently an object of universal detestation, to render her friends by no means displeased at being the involuntary witnesses of a scene so strangely scandalous. My aunt's forehead was covered with a cold sweat, she could scarcely breathe, and she stared at M. de Mortagne with a terrified and bewildered glare.

"You are not aware, perhaps, how I discovered your abominable plot?" he continued addressing my aunt, while he took some papers from his pocket—"Do you recognize this letter to the governor of

Venice? Do you recognize these incendiary proclamations? All this surprises you gentlemen?" said M. de Mortagne, who detected the looks of uneasy curiosity which were cast upon these mysterious papers. "You do not understand me? I can easily believe it, for never was there a plot more wickedly and more adroitly conceived. Listen then—and learn at last to know this woman. Eight years ago I accused her, before all of you, who constituted the family council for the protection of my niece's interests, of treating that unfortunate child with more than a step-mother's cruelty. I asked you to withdraw Matilda from her charge, you refused, I was alone, you had numbers on your side, and I was forced to resign myself. I was at that time obliged to leave Paris; where, however, I hoped soon to return, in order, whoever might like it or not, to watch unceasingly over Matilda's education. Her aunt dreaded my return, you shall see how she prevented it—you tremble before this woman, I perceive, but perhaps you will have courage enough to acknowledge the blackness of her heart, if heart there be in that hideous body."

"And you suffer this? And you allow me to be thus insulted?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran with fury, and turning towards the hearers of these strange revelations.

Not a soul answered her.

"Eight years ago"—continued M. de Mortagne, "I set off for Italy, I was to wait at Naples for M. de Rochegune, who was the son of one of my best friends. That young man who possessed an ardent and generous heart, was to have accompanied me into Greece, in order to take a share in the struggle which was then going on in that country. I was a complete stranger to all the plots which the secret societies were then organizing in Italy. I arrived at Venice. At first I was not molested—but one night the police visited my house, I was arrested, and put into fetters, my papers and property were seized, and I was placed in the closest confinement. I protested my innocence, and defied them to establish the least proof of guilt against me; the answer I received was, that the Austrian Government had been informed of my evil designs, and that I had come to take an active part in the proceedings of the revolutionary societies. My trunks were brought and opened in my presence, and in the bottom—a second and secret one of which I did not even know the existence—several sealed packets were found."

"Why you must all be as mad as the man is himself to listen seriously to such nonsense,"—exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran—"For my part I won't hear it any longer," and she got up.

"Very well, be off, it is not to you that I have any need of revealing these abominable mysteries, you know them too well already." Mademoiselle de Maran sat down again, trembling with rage.

M. de Mortagne continued,

"These packets were opened, and in them were discovered the most incendiary manifestoes, proclamations of the Carbonari, a plan of an insurrection against the Austrian Government, and some mysterious letters directed to me, with the Paris post-mark, which I was supposed to have read, and in which I was promised the assistance of all the free men in Lombardy.—These were crushing evidences, and I was thunderstruck at this inexplicable discovery. I was questioned as to my opinions, and I was not coward enough to deny them. I replied that I had devoted myself to one sole cause, that of sacred, immaculate liberty. Those men could not understand that, when I was courageous enough to avow opinions which might be my ruin, I ought to be believed when I swore upon my honour that I knew not those dangerous papers existed. I was thrown into a dungeon where I remained for eight years, and when I came out, as you see, with the decrepitude without the years of old age.—Now, do you know, how I had been made the bearer of those fatal papers? A short time before I set off for Italy, this woman had sent Servien—the worthy servant of a worthy mistress—to the servant who was to accompany me. Under the pretext of introducing some contraband articles into Italy, and thus realizing a large profit, he persuaded him to have a second bottom put into my trunks, without my knowledge, and to hide there the pretended packets of English lace. Once arrived at Venice, an agent was to come and take the lace, and to give twenty-five louis to my servant. The unfortunate fellow, who was not aware of the danger of this commission, complied—I set off, and there set off also almost at the same time as myself, this letter addressed to the governor of Venice.

"M. de Mortagne, who formerly served under the empire, and who is well known for the extravagance of his revolutionary ideas, and for his intimacy with the turbulent levellers of every nation, will arrive at Venice in the course of May, the proof of his dangerous designs will be easily found by searching several of his trunks, which are provided with double bottoms."

"Well, is that infamous enough?" exclaimed M. de Mortagne, crossing his arms upon his breast and casting a look of indignation at Mademoiselle de Maran.

"And pray what have I got to do, sir, with your packets of lace, full of conspiracies? Is it my fault, if, on seeing your revolutionary projects defeated, you have invented an absurd history which no one believes and with reason? Who will ever be persuaded that I have amused myself with fabricating proclamations, constitutions, and conspiracies, and that I made one of my own servants the confidant of this fine undertaking? Pooh, pooh, sir, you are mad. There is not a word of truth in the whole story—I deny it!"

"You deny it do you?—and your infamous Servien? will he

deny too the deposition of my servant, who formally accuses him of having brought and delivered the packets into his hands?"

"Your servant?" exclaimed my aunt with a loud laugh. "That is a nice sort of evidence, indeed, and one sure to be believed. Like master, like man, sir. And your former performances pretty well known? What is there surprising in the letter which you have read to us, and which was addressed to the governor of Venice? Have you not always declared yourself the champion of the *friends and brothers* of every country under the sun? The police here who keep a pretty sharp eye upon you, probably informed—as an act of neighbourly kindness—the Austrian police, of your projects—what can be more simple? The thing is done every day. For God's sake then don't bother us any more with your packets of lace, crammed full of conspiracies, it is nothing but an old mother goose story—you tried to come out as a Brutus, a Washington, a La Fayette, and they clapped you into prison, which they were quite right in doing. You grumble at your hair having become white, how can I help it? Every body knows the dungeons of Venice have not exactly the properties of the Fountain of youth. If, as seems to be the case, your head is a little cracked from the consequences of your confinement; for God's sake have some shower baths, and leave us in peace, for you are really intolerable."

Mademoiselle de Maran's cruel sarcasms, contrary to my expectation, made not the least impression upon M. de Mortagne. He replied with the greatest *sang froid*, "Thanks to the active and friendly exertions of Madame de Richeville, M. de Rochegune, and some other friends, I am once more free; in spite of your brazen audacity, we have sufficient evidence to nail you to the pillory of public opinion, and I will succeed in doing so."

"We shall see, sir."

"And you shall not be nailed to it alone, for I will fasten your accomplices at your side; those, who from cowardly, selfish, or mercenary motives, have served your infamous purposes. Do *you* hear M. de Lancry? do *you* hear M. d'Orbeval? do *you* hear M. de Versac?"

These words were received with an explosive burst of indignation, but M. de Mortagne, not in the slightest degree disturbed, continued.

"Indeed I hardly know, gentlemen, if *your* conduct is not still more execrable than Mademoiselle de Maran's. She hates me—she also hates her niece; and though hatred is a detestable passion, it proves at least a certain energy. But you three have struggled, which should surpass the others in cowardice, selfishness and cupidity."

"Go on, sir, go on," said Gontran, who was pale with rage.

"No doubt, a day arrived when you, M. de Versac, said to Mademoiselle Maran, 'my nephew is over head and ears in debt, he is a desperate gambler, the world may shut its eyes to his scandalous adventures, but he is a great trouble to me, and if he gets into any awkward scrape, I shall be obliged to extricate him out of natural consideration. Your niece is extremely rich, let us arrange a marriage between them, my nephew's debts will be paid, and I shall have no more bother about his affairs.'"

"Sir," said M. de Versac, with the most perfect courtesy of manner. "Permit me to observe, that what you do me the honour of asserting, is completely incorrect, and that—"

"*Monsieur le duc*," continued M. de Mortagne, "if you had a daughter who was very dear to you, would you give her to your nephew? Answer upon your honour."

"I do not think, sir, that you and I are upon terms of such particular intimacy, as to require that I should make you my confidant upon that subject," replied M. de Versac.

"This evasion is a blasting one for your nephew," continued M. de Mortagne.

Gontran was about to give way to his fury, but I restrained him by dint of supplications. M. de Mortagne continued.

"When this marriage was proposed, Mademoiselle de Maran, doubtless, considered it under every aspect. Yes, she asked herself, if the future husband was really endowed with all the faults and all the vices necessary to ensure the misery of her niece, whom she detested. M. de Lancry appeared to her to possess the requisite qualities, she gave her promise, therefore, to M. de Versac, and the odious machination was duly commenced. People talk of human justice, and yet such a thing as this can be done with impunity!" exclaimed M. de Mortagne with indignation. "Here is a young girl, an orphan, a stranger, from her earliest years, to any affection, abandoned to herself, without one to protect or to advise her. They throw her, every instant of the day, into the company of a man endowed with the most seductive and the most dangerous fascinations, every honourable rival is sedulously kept away, she is delivered up to this man, and to him alone—to a man who has long been thoroughly versed in every intrigue of gallantry. She, poor child, without experience, accustomed to the cruelties and the treacheries of a step-mother, listens with an ingenuous and delighted confidence, to the hypocritical flatteries and the lying promises of this man. Ignorant of the danger she is incurring, she only finds out her love—when that love is fixed ineradicably in her heart. The unhappy girl has not one friend—one relation, to enlighten her as to the dangers in her path, the situation, and the former conduct of the man who is deceiving her."

"Enough, sir. enough!" I exclaimed, transported with indigna-

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Fig. 10. The Company.

tion, for I suffered cruelly at the thoughts of what Gontran must be enduring. "It is for me—and for me alone, to answer here. Instead of concealing that past life which you so bitterly reproach him with, M. de Lancry, in a spirit of honourable frankness, gave me himself that information, which it was impossible for me to seek, he said to me—'I will not deceive you, my youth has been a dissipated one, I have been a gambler and a prodigal.' But when M. de Lancry wished to speak to me of his own fortune, of the little which he still possessed, I refused to listen to him, I have not been deceived then into giving my hand to M. de Lancry. I have a deep and absolute confidence in the assurances which he has given me, in the future which I expect at his hands, and bitterly regretting as I do this sad discussion, I am happy, oh! very happy at being enabled to declare now and here, in the most solemn and unhesitating manner, that I am proud of the man whom I have chosen."

M. de Mortagne looked at me with painful astonishment.

"Matilda, Matilda, poor girl. Your confidence is abused—you do not know what a fate awaits you."

"I shall always respect, sir, the sentiment which has dictated your conduct, and I hope that some day you will acknowledge the injustice of your prejudices against M. de Lancry."

Then going to the table on which the contract was lying, I hastily signed the paper, and said to M. de Mortagne—

"There is my answer, sir."

And I gave the pen to Gontran. M. de Mortagne rushed towards him, and said, addressing him in a voice that was almost imploring in its emotion :

"Oh! have pity upon her. You are young, all good feeling cannot be dead in your heart. Mercy for Matilda! mercy for so much candour, for so much confidence, for so much generosity. Do not abuse the influence you possess over her—you well know you cannot make her happy. Is it her fortune that you covet? well, sir, speak out, I am rich—"

At this last offer, which was an outrage, Gontran turned pale with fury.

"Sign, oh! sign!" I said, in a faltering voice, to M. de Lancry.

"Yes, yes—I *will* sign," he replied, with suppressed rage.

"Were I not to sign, it would be to confess myself guilty, to confess that I deserve the outrages of this man; were I not to sign, it would be to acknowledge that I am unworthy of you, Matilda."

And Gontran signed.

"Say rather, that not to sign would be to renounce the fortune which you covet, for you are utterly unworthy of understanding and appreciating the qualities of that angel. In two months you

will treat her as brutally as you do your mistresses, unless a stop be put to your proceedings."

"Gontran," I whispered to M. de Lancry. "I am now your wife, grant me the first request which I make, do not say a word to M. de Mortagne, I implore you, put an end to this scene which is killing me."

Gontran reflected for a few moments and then said to me, while his countenance became gloomy in its expression.

"Be it so, Matilda. You ask me a serious boon, and I grant it to you."

"The sacrifice is consummated," said M. de Mortagne, "this was to be expected. Well, *now* is the time for courage. More than ever is it now my task to watch over you, Matilda. It will be my duty to render, if possible, the consequences of your fatal imprudence less deadly to you, and to prevent the misfortunes which I foresee. Rest assured, wherever you are, I will be, wherever you go, I will follow. That monster," and he pointed to Mademoiselle de Maran, "has been your evil genius, I will be your guardian spirit. And on this spot I declare an exterminating war, a war without quarter and without mercy against all our enemies wherever they may be. My locks are white, my brow is furrowed, but God has left me still the energy and devotion of the heart. Alas! poor girl, I have come late into the path of your existence. But I will hope that I have not come *too late*. Adieu, my child, adieu. I will sign this contract, I will be present at your marriage, it is my right and my duty. And at this instant, more than ever, am I determined to fulfil that duty and that right."

And going up to the table, he signed the contract with a steady hand. The voice, the countenance of M. de Mortagne bore such a character of authority, that no one said a word. When he had signed, he said:

"M. d'Orbeval, M. de Versac, M. de Lancry, I retract nothing that I have said, I spoke the truth, I maintain it and will maintain it to be the truth, here and everywhere else. Ten years ago, I should have added, M. de Lancry, that I would maintain it with my sword in my hand! To day I will not say so; my life belongs to this poor girl, who, I well see, has no one left but me in this world! You need not smile contemptuously, young man, you well know that M. de Mortagne knows not fear."

Then extending his right arm he made an imperious and menacing sign with his forefinger; and said to M. de Lancry—

"If you do not atone for your past life, if you do not render yourself worthy of that angel, by the tenderest gratitude, by an adoration uninterrupted for an instant, it will be you, sir, who will have to tremble, before me—Oh! savage looks do not frighten

me, I have tamed fiercer animals than you." And with these words M. de Mortagne slowly withdrew.

Scarcely was he gone when the kind of stupefaction which had been caused by this singular man, vanished. Everybody attacked him, spoke of him with contempt, and accused him of being mad. They began to remember that about nine years previously he had indulged in the same incredible and savage attacks. The interest which he had for a moment excited, by relating the treachery of Mademoiselle de Maran, soon grew cold, almost all our relations took my aunt's part, and assured her that, they did not believe a single word of M. de Mortagne's romance on the causes of his captivity at Venice.

A few minutes after his departure, we went to the mayor's office.

In spite of the cruel scene, which had just taken place, my blind confidence in M. de Lancry was not shaken. M. de Mortagne and Madame de Richeville, accused him of faults which he had himself confessed to me, and for which he had found an excuse, and almost a justification in his love for me. I had believed him, and my only feelings were irritation against M. de Mortagne, and redoubled tenderness for Gontran. I reproached myself bitterly for having been the cause of a scene so painful to him, and I formed the firm resolution of blotting it from his memory by the strength of my affectionate devotion. If you are astonished, my friend, at this obstinacy in concluding the marriage, notwithstanding so many vague or positive warnings, it is because you cannot know the blind and intractable obstinacy of love, which always increases in almost an exact ratio to the opposition with which it meets.

It was with a rapture which had something holy in it that I uttered the word *yes*, when I was asked if I took Gontran as my husband. When the ceremony was concluded we returned to the Hôtel de Maran.

Next morning we went to the Chapel of the Chamber of Peers, where the marriage was to take place at nine o'clock. On our entrance the first person I perceived was M. de Mortagne. As he had not been informed the evening before, he had been unable to assist at the civil ceremony.

The Bishop of Amiens united us. His address to Gontran, was, grave, serious, almost severe, I fancied my husband was judged by his past conduct, and I was almost proud of the kind of conversion which his love for me was about to operate for the future. When we had come out of the chapel, we returned into a drawing-room which the chancellor had been kind enough to place at our disposal. I was close to the window with Gontran, and Mademoiselle de Maran, waiting for M. de Versac's return with whom we were to take our departure.

M. de Mortagne approached us.

I saw Gontran's eyes sparkle with rage, and overcome with terror, I took his arm and said to him. "Gontran, remember your promise." But he repulsed me almost harshly, and replied, "Let me alone—I know what I have got to do." And then going close up to M. de Mortagne, he said to him in a hollow voice.

"I put up with your outrages and threats sir, as long as I had reasons for so doing, those reasons now exist no longer, and I must insist upon your giving me satisfaction now that Mademoiselle Mathilde is my wife."

Mademoiselle de Maran took Gontran by the hand, and her eyes glittered with an expression of infernal malice. She said pointing to M. de Mortagne.

"That person must henceforth be sacred and inviolable in your eyes, do you hear? Whatever he says or does, you must endure everything from him."

"I must endure everything?" replied Gontran, "and why then must I do so?"

"Why?" And Mademoiselle de Maran glaring like a rattlesnake upon me and M. de Mortagne, said with that fearful smile of hers—"You must endure everything from M. de Mortagne, my poor Gontran, for a very simple reason, because one must not fight a duel with—the father of one's wife."

"M. de Mortagne was thunderstruck—Gontran stared at him with stupefaction. As for me, for a few instants I did not understand the full and frightful force of Mademoiselle de Maran's execrable words. Then, when they shot through my mind like a scathing dart of fire, I had only force to exclaim, "Oh, my mother!" and fainted immediately.

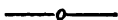
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Years have passed, my friend, since that horrible scene, many and bitter tears have I shed when I thought of it, and even now I weep while I retrace it. Oh, my mother! My mother! Holiest of women! Thou whose angelic virtue shone with so pure a ray that the monster who caused thy tedious agony did not even dare to calumniate thee in thy life time! Oh my mother! Long, long, indeed must your ashes have grown cold, before a sacrilegious hatred could have dared to profane your memory.

\* \* \* \* \*

Such was my childhood, such was my early youth, till the period of my marriage. My spirit feels so broken, so despairing, all these memories of the past have distracted me with such various emotions.

that I must recollect myself a little before I proceed to relate to you the second period of my existence.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## LOVE'S RETREAT.

WHEN we came out from the chapel of the Luxembourg, after the celebration of my marriage with M. de Lancry, what was my astonishment at beholding a carriage and post-horses in waiting! Madame Blondeau was seated behind, and M. de Lancry's *valet de chambre* opened the door.

"Where are we going to?" I asked Gontran,— "Will you trust yourself with me?" he replied with a smile.

I got in, delighted at the thought that I should doubtless see no more Mademoiselle de Maran. Her atrocious and insane calumny against my mother had put the finishing stroke to my aversion for her.

In vain had Gontran pointed out, that her conduct was no longer malice but actual madness, and that suspicions so odious fell to the ground of themselves, I still felt that it would be impossible for me to meet Mademoiselle de Maran from that time forward.

The carriage set off at a rapid pace. During the three hours that our journey lasted, nothing could exceed the delicacy of Gontran's attentions to me, he spoke but little, and the words he uttered were remarkable for a touching kindness that was almost grave and solemn in its tenderness. Doubtless he thought, as I did, that a dreamy and melancholy kind of meditation can alone initiate us into the full enjoyment of the greatest felicities.

Nothing can be more serious, nothing more pensive than happiness, when it attains the ideal in its intensity. I was touched even to tears by the expression of protecting tenderness with which Gontran often gazed at me. Never, I think, did my soul feel more exalted, never did my bosom beat with more generous impulses. I reflected, with enchantment, on all the great and holy duties which I now had to fulfil. I contemplated the future with a calm and proud serenity, and I waited with a pious impatience for the moment when I should be able to prove to M. de Lancry what boundless treasures existed in my heart. Nay, when I thought that perchance by force of love, I should become indispensable to the happiness of Gontran's existence, I experienced for a moment the mad ardour, the glorious intoxication, the magnificent pride which ambition must excite in men.

We arrived at Chantilly.

It was the end of April. The sun, which had not yet half its

rays, shone with a gentle and tepid light. To my great surprise, our carriage entered the forest, and went along by the picturesque fish ponds of the *Reine blanche*, and reached the border of those woods which skirt the *desert*.

M. de Lancry assisted me out of the carriage, which he sent back with his *valet de chambre*, Madame Blondeau only remained with us.

Gontran offered me his arm, smiling at my surprise.

We proceeded along a little path which was already redolent with the perfumes of violets and primroses, and after a few minutes we arrived at a very high and very thick hedge of hawthorn in full flower, in the middle of which appeared a rustic wooden gate.

This door was opened for us by Blondeau, and we went in.

Never was there a *chalet* more coquettishly adorned than this little house. The different compartments of its roof were covered with pots of flowers, almost buried in moss, and the garden clumps were so thronged with rose trees, heliotropes, jessamines, stocks, and privet-leaved lilacs, that the *parterre* was like one immense flower vase, or one gigantic nosegay.

Our cottage was laid out on the ground floor, and there was a little drawing-room as you went in, where, to my infinite surprise, I saw my own piano, my own harp, and the books which I had left the day before at the *Hôtel de Maran*. It was almost miraculous.

On the right were two little rooms for me, on the left two for Gontran, and at the bottom of the garden was a rural wooden little building, which contained Blondeau's room, and our kitchen.

It would be as impossible to describe the incredible, the almost fairy eloquence of this miniature Eden, as it would be to paint my gratitude to Gontran, or my childish delight at hearing we were going to reside there for some time.

M. de Lancry laughingly asked Blondeau whether she were clever enough to cook our dinner every day.

My *gouvernante* replied, with a most conceited look, that her culinary skill would astonish us. We were to have no other servant during our residence in the cottage.

Need I tell you how much I appreciated this delicate attention of Gontran's?

It was hardly three o'clock, so I set off arm in arm with my husband to take a long walk in the forest. The sun had by degrees broken through his veil of clouds, the balmy air was saturated with the thousand odours of spring, the leaves—yet in all the tenderness of their early verdure—quivered beneath the gentle breath of the zephyr, birds of every kind were chirping, fluttering, and pursuing one another among the leaves of the noble forest trees, and their joyous little twitterings were the only sounds that disturbed the profound silence of the forest.

My heart expanded in my bosom, and I inhaled, with ineffable avidity, all the perfumes and all the sweet emanations of nature.

I leant still more upon Gontran's arm, we walked along very slowly, scarcely exchanging, from time to time, a few interrupted words.

For a moment I tried to recal some of the impressions of my early youth, but strange to say, I found it almost impossible. The past appeared like a vague and half veiled dream, which was escaping from my remembrance. I have never been able to account for this extraordinary sensation. Were my faculties then so completely invaded by and absorbed in my present felicity, that I lost even the memory of days gone by? Gradually these feelings became so acute that I half closed my eyes, and could scarcely take another step, in spite of myself my head drooped languidly down upon Gontran's shoulder, and I clasped my two hands upon his arm.

Gontran who was, doubtlessly, no less moved than myself, stood still, and did not offer to interrupt this inexplicable and overwhelming emotion.

"Forgive me," I said, after a few minutes silence. "I am very weak, and very childish, am I not? But what can I do? so much happiness is too great for my strength to bear. Oh! how happy you ought to be, in inspiring a love so intense."

"You are right, Matilda, for to inspire is to feel. It is for *me* to ask you to forgive my silence. And yet—no—silence itself is a sort of language, so many things does it express which mere words are powerless to paint. Tell me, Matilda, what words *could* do justice to our feelings?"

"Oh! how true that is, I too think that the tongue should be silent when the heart is holding conversation with the feelings. But good heavens," I added with a smile, "you will think all this very metaphysical, very ridiculous. You see how right you are—I attempt to explain these adorable sensations, and I talk nonsense. Let us continue our walk, and leave our two hearts to commune together in silence."

The sun was beginning to go down when we returned to the cottage, which was already almost buried in the shades of evening, so thick was the foliage of the trees which surrounded it.

We were delighted to find a cheerful and sparkling fire, of pine seed, in the drawing-room, which Madame Blondeau had taken the precaution to light, as the spring evenings were still cold. A little table, charmingly laid out for our dinner, was placed near the fire-place.

Gontran fairly confessed that he felt extremely disposed to do credit to my *gouvernante's* culinary skill. Blondeau had excelled herself upon this occasion, our dinner was a very gay one, and we waited upon ourselves. I tried to anticipate Gontran's wants, and

he mine, which led to all kinds of playful discussions, in which he invariably concluded by giving in.

After dinner he opened the door of the drawing-room, and rolled up a great arm chair, on which I sat down.

"Look what a beautiful evening it is," he said. A lovely moonlight was casting its silvery illumination upon our little garden, and on the summits of the surrounding trees.

A breathless silence pervaded the forest. Above us the stars were glittering in the vaults of heaven, and around us burst forth the perfumes of a thousand flowers.

Gontran sat down at my feet. His noble and handsome countenance was turned towards me; and a pale moon-beam played upon his forehead and his hair. He held one of my hands in his, and gazed at me with a kind of ecstasy. Strange contradiction of human nature! At that instant, I believe, I had attained the highest pinnacle of happiness: the man I loved with all the powers of my soul, was at my feet, the mysterious calmness of a lovely night still more increased my enchantment, and yet, at that very instant, an indescribable expression of sadness shot across my heart—and I wept.

Gontran beheld my tears, and his eyes were soon moistened also. I pressed my drooping forehead to his, and our tears mingled together.

Alas! alas! whence sprang those tears? Are we then so miserably endowed by nature, that certain felicities crush us by their very weight? Or is the involuntary melancholy which those felicities inspire, a presentiment of their brief duration?

\* \* \* \* \*

What shall I say of those blessed days which passed so happily and so rapidly? what shall I say of that existence all of love and solitude which God himself encompassed with all his splendours? for the finest weather smiled upon our retreat.

A sketch of one day will enable you to understand my bitter regrets when I was compelled to abandon that enchanting existence.

Every morning, after having admired my basket of jessamines and heliotropes, which had never failed to greet me when I first awoke, and which Gontran took a pleasure in plucking himself from our garden, every morning we set off very early to take a walk in the forest, it was a delight to us to tread underfoot the tall, dewy blades of grass, to enjoy the aromatic perfumes of the various plants, and to see the stags and the hinds retreating into the densest recesses of the woods.

I then would often sit down at my piano, to sing, with Gontran,

certain duets, certain airs, which were associated in our hearts with tender recollections. At other times we read, Gontran had a delightful voice, and I was never wearied of hearing him read some of my favourite poets. These delicious occupations were intermingled with long conversations, projects for the future, and pleasant glances already thrown back upon the past. As the dinner hour approached, we retired to our respective toilets, in which we employed as much taste and coquetry as if we were living in a château full of company. Gontran's praises and flatteries possessed an infinite value in my eyes, and I delighted in dressing my own hair, in order that I might be indebted to myself alone, for all the commendations which I should obtain from him.

Notwithstanding our experience of Madame Blondeau's skill, M. de Lanery who made no secret of his partiality for good living, had sent for his cook to Chantilly, by means of a *cantine de chasse* admirably fitted up, our dinner was sent every day from that village with ice and fruits, and Blondeau had only to wait upon us at table, Gontran also kept some horses at Chantilly. After dinner our carriage came for us, and we took long drives in the magnificent alleys of the forest. Sometimes we would return by moonlight, absorbed in the most delicious reveries. We entered our little cottage, the carriage was dismissed, and Blondeau brought up tea. Oh! what long and delicious evenings we spent thus, with our drawing-room door open, while we revelled in all the beauties of those spring nights, whose silence was only interrupted by the gentle rustling of the leaves. Oh! what enchanting hours we spent thus, hours, during which I listened to Gontran's account of his life, his early youth, the battles in which his father had borne a part, who had been one of the heroes of La Vendée, and died valiantly fighting for his religion and his king, in the wild *landes* of Brittany.

With what insatiable curiosity I questioned Gontran about the war in which he had served himself, and upon the dangers which he had incurred. The more insight I acquired, thanks to his confidence, into his past life, the more I became convinced of the frivolity and injustice of Madame de Richeville's and M. de Mortagne's accusations. They described Gontran to me as a man of uncertain disposition, selfish, harsh, thoroughly *blasé* and incapable of comprehending the delicacy of an elevated affection. With what joy, with what pride was it that I found Gontran on the contrary, full of gentleness, attentions and tenderness, and endowed above all, with the most perfect, the most exquisite tact.

\* \* \* \* \*

This happiness had endured for three weeks. One evening at tea, Gontran said to me with a smile.

"Matilda, I have an important proposal to make to you!"

"Oh! tell it me, love, tell it me."

"Will you prolong our residence here for a little while? that is to say if this solitary existence does not displease you."

"Gontran! Gontran!"

"You consent then?"

"Consent! yes, with joy, rapture. But, Gontran, your indulgence will spoil my whole life, once mingling again with the world, how great will be my regrets, how great my sacrifices! And why? and for whom? good God!"

"You are right, Matilda," said Gontran, with a sigh. "Why? for whom? There are so many enchantments in an existence like *this*! and yet we must leave it to throw ourselves into that sparkling abyss which is called the world."

"But what compels us to do so, love? Of what use are riches except to enable us to live as we like? But no—you only say that, Gontran, out of kindness to me. You are still too young, too brilliant to renounce the world."

"Poor girl," said Gontran with a gentle smile, "on the contrary, it is you who are too young to deprive yourself of pleasures which you scarcely know. This life which you now find so enchanting, would, if much prolonged, become distasteful to you from its monotony."

"Ah! Gontran, you tell me I am beautiful—will you get tired of my beauty then?"

"Matilda, what a difference."

Gontran was interrupted by a noise of footsteps and voices, quite unusual in our peaceful retreat. The voices came from the other side of the hedge, it was eleven o'clock at night, and I become uneasy.

"I will go and open the door," said Gontran.

"Good God! love be cautious."

"There is nothing to fear. This forest is traversed during the whole night by the Duke de Bourbon's keepers."

"It is I, *monsieur le vicomte*, Germain."

It was a groom of M. de Lancry's. My husband opened the door.

"What do you want?"

"The *chasseur* of M. le comte de Lugarto has brought a letter for M. le vicomte. He has ridden the whole distance. He knew where we were stopping at Chantilly with the horses, so he came to us, and desired us to conduct him to *monsieur*, as he had a letter of importance to deliver."

"Where is the man?"

"There, behind the door, *monsieur le vicomte*."

"Show him in."

By the light of the drawing-room lamp I beheld a tall man in the

dress of a *courier*. I know not why, but his countenance appeared to me a sinister one. He took off his cap and gave a letter to M. de Lancry. Gontran, since the arrival of this man, seemed greatly annoyed, indeed almost overcome. He approached the lamp, opened the letter, and read it rapidly. Twice he frowned and seemed to me to repress with difficulty a movement of impatience or rage. When he had read the letter, he tore it up, and said to the *courier*—

"Very well, tell your master I will see him to-morrow at Paris."

Then addressing his groom, M. de Lancry added—"Tell Pierre to bring the travelling carriage here to-morrow morning. The rest of you must set off to-night for Paris with the horses and the *calèche*. When you arrive at the *hôtel*, tell them to have everything ready, as I shall be there in the course of the day."

When the two servants were gone, I said to Gontran with uneasiness :

"You appear annoyed love, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, I assure you—nothing. It is merely a rather important service, which one of my friends, who has just come from England, requires at my hands. This will compel me to be at Paris sooner than I intended."

"What a pity to leave this retreat," I said to Gontran, unable to restrain my tears.

"Come, come," he said gently. "Matilda, you are really childish."

"But we shall come back ! Oh, yes, shall we not ? This little house will ever be for us a loving, a sacred remembrance !"

"Certainly, certainly, Matilda : but I must leave you now. We must set off very early to-morrow, I am in a hurry to get to Paris. You must have some orders to give to Madame Blondeau. I will go and take a walk, for I have a little headache,"

"Let me go with you, love."

"No, no, you need not go."

"I entreat you, Gontran, let me go—you are not well."

"Once more, I prefer being alone," said M. de Lancry with a slight impatience in his manner. And he proceeded towards the garden gate.

I wept, and my tears were *this* time tears of bitterness.

I withdrew to my own room, where I awaited the return of Gontran. He came back in about an hour, walked up and down in the drawing-room for a considerable time, and then retired to his own apartment.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE DEPARTURE.

I passed a miserable night, reflecting upon the uneasiness and agitation, which M. de Lancry had been unable to dissemble. I rose at dawn of day, a prey to the most painful emotion. I was desirous of casting a last look upon that mysterious and charming retreat where I had spent so many happy moments. Alas! was it an omen? Was so much felicity to vanish for ever? The sky which had been so clear, during so many days, was beginning to veil itself in masses of black clouds, and a cold, piercing wind moaned sadly through the great trees of the forest. The predisposition of the heart is a prism which colours exterior objects with its own dark or cheerful reflections. One thing I particularly remarked, a childish one indeed, and yet it pierced my heart—All the flowers which adorned our residence had been brought thither and transplanted, like, as it were, some rustic decoration. By degrees they had drooped and withered. While absorbed in happiness, while beholding everything through the brilliant rays which love cast upon my existence, I had not perceived the gradual drooping of those poor plants, but now, beneath that sombre sky, and reflecting upon that departure which to me would be such a melancholy one, I was painfully struck at the sight. In spite of myself I discovered a vague resemblance between the happy days which I had passed, and the existence of those flowers—poor, ephemeral things, exiles from their natal soil, and without roots in their new abode, poor things which instead of bursting forth every morning always fresh and always lovely, were dying now of a precocious death after having diffused a brief perfume, a fleeting brilliancy. I shuddered when I asked myself if it was to be thus with the felicity which I had tasted. Yet I was desirous of throwing off those painful reflections, which I thought were almost a blasphemy. I piously gathered some heliotropes and jessamines, which I inwardly vowed I would keep for ever, and the thought occurred to me that after all it was madness in me to seek for melancholy omens in a state of things which it depended upon myself to terminate, I resolved to

establish a gardener in our little house to cultivate flowers which there at least should not perish in a few days. In a mood of strange reflection I asked myself why such religious care should be bestowed in keeping up its melancholy garden of a cemetery, and why those spots which are hallowed by memories of happiness and love should not be treated with the same pious and touching attentions. When I re-entered the house I found Gontran, who seemed still more gloomy than the night before. The carriage now drove up, and we set off.

M. de Lancry said not a word of regret at leaving our little cottage abandoned to the care of one of his men, and his silence hurt me. Presently Gontran said to me :

"Matilda, to-morrow I shall introduce to you one of my best and most intimate friends. M. Lugarto, who has just arrived from London. It is in order to render him a rather important service which he requires, that I leave Chantilly. We shall see a good deal of Lugarto, I am very fond of him, and I wish you to give him a warm reception."

"Although M. Lugarto be the cause of our sudden return to Paris," I said with a smile to M. de Lancry. "I promise you that I will forget this great injury, and that I will receive your friend as you desire. But you never mentioned him to me before."

"I was at the same time so absorbed in my love and so detached by it from everything else," gracefully replied Gontran, "that there are many things which I have never told you. I had left Lugarto in London, he is a very idle fellow, writes but seldom, and the conversations I was enjoying were too delicious to allow of my troubling myself about the ungrateful fellow's long silence."

"But, Gontran, do you know you must be very fond of M. Lugarto indeed, to make such a sacrifice to him as you are now doing? We were so happy in our retreat."

"Yes, yes, certainly we were, but on the other hand, Lugarto formerly rendered me some very great services, I will tell you the whole story some day."

"Oh! if that is the case, love, if you are acquitting a debt of gratitude, I shall not complain any more; besides I have a project of my own, and in my turn I shall ask a favor of you, to which I attribute a vast importance."

"Speak, speak, Matilda."

"Well then, you must promise me to come and spend a few days every month, in our little cottage at Chantilly."

Gontran looked at me with astonishment.

"Why the cottage does not belong to me," he replied.

A pang of pain shot through my heart.

"What do you mean?" I enquired.

"Good heavens, nothing can be simpler. I had desired my man

of business to find out some little house at Chantilly, or in some retired place, and to hire it for the season; he ferretted out this little cottage which was almost buried in the forest. I came to look at it, I thought the situation perfect, and I sent down my upholsterer who has great taste as a decorator, for, as you may have seen, he has transformed a frightful hovel into a real opera *chalet*. This was the more convenient, as the proprietor of this hovel and of a few acres of land which belong to it, was about to sell them to the Duke de Bourbon. As soon as everything has been taken away which we have left in the cottage, it will be pulled down. I only hired it for four months, and there are, I believe, about three weeks to come of our term."

Alas! Gontran's words cruelly recalled to my mind the remark I had that morning made, upon the factitious splendour of our garden's ephemeral flowers. M. de Lancry, without intending it, caused me the most acute pain. That "man of business," that "upholsterer," that hiring for a "term," all those expressions came one by one to destroy all my cherished recollections. Certainly I was not mad enough to wish to escape from the realities of life, but still I fancied that that little retreat ought to remain surrounded with all its magic, with all its poetry, and that without foolish extravagance, it might be preserved inviolate for ever. I did not accuse Gontran, absorbed as he was in present happiness, he might neglect the future, and I reflected that to us women was especially and peculiarly reserved the worship of the past.

"Gontran," I said to him, "I am quite proud of an idea, which has never occurred to you, although your heart is one so ingeniously inventive."

"Speak, my dear Matilda."

"We must immediately purchase the house and the little field which surrounds it, since, luckily, it is not yet sold to the Duke de Bourbon."

"What are you thinking about, Matilda? The Prince has agreed to pay a fitting sum for the acquisition. The proprietor would only deal with us upon the same conditions as with the Prince, and in such circumstances the pretensions of those sort of people are always exorbitant."

"But, after all, what is it worth?"

"How can I tell? perhaps thirty or forty thousand francs, perhaps even more, for it is impossible to assign a reasonable price to a fancy thing of that sort."

"What, is it not dearer than that?" I joyfully exclaimed.

"Child!" replied Gontran, tenderly pressing my hand.

"But what are thirty thousand francs compared to—"

"Listen, Matilda," said M. de Lancry, interrupting me with kindness, "since we are upon this subject let us converse a little

rationally, let us talk over '*household expenses*,' (as people say), it is a very tiresome but nevertheless a very necessary subject, and besides I wish to know whether the arrangements I have made will suit you?"

"Go on, love, but you shall not escape our little house, I shall return to that subject presently."

Gontran shrugged his shoulders with a smile, looked at me, and continued:

"You are aware, Matilda, that our position in society entails upon us the necessity of keeping up a suitable establishment, worthy of our fortune, and one which will enable you at last to enjoy the pleasures so natural to your age."

"Our cottage—that is all the establishment which my heart wishes for."

"Matilda, do let us converse seriously. I have thus arranged the in-doors portion of our establishment: we must have a *maitre d'hôtel*, a *vale de chambre* for you, another for me, four footmen for the ante-chamber, and—"

"But I assure you, love, I should, for my part, far prefer to reduce the number of servants, and to preserve our little paradise."

"Do be reasonable. We must first, my dear girl, talk about necessary expenses. You must have four carriage horses and your own coachman, I must have a couple of harness and two or three saddle horses, and my English grooms, and two maids for you, without reckoning Blondeau; a cook and his assistant, will complete our domestic arrangements. Excuse all these details, my dear Matilda, but when we have once settled all this, we will not mention it again."

"I am all attention, love, and presently you shall hear my observations."

"We will reside at the *hôtel* Rochegune during the winter, we will then go to some watering place, or into Italy, so that we may get back to your country estate *de Maran*, towards the end of September, for the shooting season; we will remain there till the end of January, when we will return to Paris. You will choose your own nights for an opera box, one at the opera, and another at the *Bouffés*. And if you think a thousand francs a month sufficient for your toilet, we will fix upon that sum."

"But, love—"

"One word more, my dear Matilda, and I have done. You see our establishment will be a remarkably simple one, in our station of life we could not do with less, and now don't be angry with me if I come to those horrid figures of arithmetic. Your fortune amounts to about a hundred and thirty thousand francs a year, therefore, with what remains of mine, we may reckon pretty nearly upon an income of a hundred and fifty thousand francs, but after

deducting the purchase money of the *hôtel* Rochegune, various deficits which may occur, and the spare cash which we ought vigorously to reserve, in order to meet any unforeseen emergencies ; after that we ought not to calculate for certain upon more than about a hundred thousand francs. Well then, my dear Matilda, we must have no more, or no less than that, in order to keep up our establishment upon the footing which I have described. You see then, we only possess enough for what might be called, the *necessities of luxury*, without anything superfluous, for all the expenses which I have enumerated to you are absolutely indispensable."

"No fault, love, can ever be found with any thing which you do, although I think we might certainly live very happily without sacrificing so much to the *necessities* to which you allude, but whatever you wish is right, I only desire to see through your eyes, and to think with your thoughts. Only, I am determined, even if for that purpose I should have to encroach upon the allowance you make me, I am determined, do you hear? absolutely determined to have my little cottage at Chantilly, that, to me, is the most indispensable, the most necessary, the least superfluous of all expenses, it shall be the *luxury* of my heart. We will go on a delightful little pilgrimage there now and then, with no other *suite* but poor Blondeau."

"Well, well, be easy upon that score, we will talk of that another time, little obstinacy," said Gontran gaily. "Ah! by the bye, I quite forgot one thing, we must send our architect to your château de Maran. No one has lived there for the last twenty years but your bailiff, the place must be quite in ruins."

"No doubt it is, and then a château is such a great large place! I tell you what it is, love, even if you scold me, your cottage has spoilt me. "Ah! how heavy and tiresome the spring will appear to me at Paris, compared to that beautiful spring which smiled at Chantilly. Confess that I bear malice, for I really cannot forgive your friend the sacrifices which you are making to him."

"Talking of Lugarto," said Gontran. "You must excuse his manners, which are of rather a cavalier kind, and not always such as are suited to the most refined company. He has always been so spoilt."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, upon second thoughts, Matilda, I cannot do better than give you, as near as I can, a portrait of Lugarto, so that you will at least be able to recognise him when I introduce him to you. Lugarto is hardly twenty three years old: and is of Brahmin origin. His father, who was the son of a half-caste slave, was enfranchised from his early childhood. This father of his, having at first been the *intendant* of a very distinguished Portuguese nobleman, managed his master's fortune so well or so badly, that he completely ruined

him, and acquired for himself a great portion of that master's property. Such was the origin of a fortune, which, considerable at first, became at last a colossal one, for M. Lugarto increased his property to such an extent by speculations, and grants of mines in South America, that at his death he left his son more than sixty millions. The old Lugarto had lived in the Colonies with all the luxuriousness and depravity of a satrap. Profoundly corrupted, boasting of principles the most cynical and disgusting, and no less cowardly than brutal, he had, it is said, so ill used his wife in one of his fits of ferocious passion, that she died from the consequences of his violence."

"But such a man was a monster!" I exclaimed. "The memory of such a father must be a melancholy and cruel inheritance. His son must be much to be pitied in spite of all his millions!"

"And the more to be pitied," said Gontran with a bitter smile, "because his father set him the most hideous example. At fifteen years of age, the master of a royal fortune, Lugarto grew up amongst excesses and flatteries of every description. At twenty, he already experienced the satiety of old age, thanks to his abuse of all which gold can procure. Naturally frail and delicate, with a constitution worn out before its development, there is nothing young about him but his age, and his very countenance, in spite of some agreeable features, has a kind of morbid, withered and convulsive appearance, which reveals the existence of precocious infirmities."

I listened to Gontran with astonishment, while he was describing M. Lugarto, his voice had a tone of biting irony, and he appeared to delight in his gloomy portraiture of the man's character. For one moment I was on the point of making this observation to Gontran, but some scruple, though I know not what, checked me, and he continued thus—

"Morally speaking, Lugarto is profoundly depraved, without faith, courage, or kindness, and accustomed to hold all men in sovereign contempt, because nearly all have paid the most servile adulation to his wealth. At one time, prodigal to madness, at another, sordidly avaricious, his expenditure has but one moving spring—vanity: but one purpose—ostentation. The most wily lawyer is not more skilled in business, he manages, unassisted, his colossal fortune with incredible sagacity and adroitness, and he daily increases his riches by the most dishonorable speculations. The very image of his father, in him the mean rapacity of the slave still contends with the ridiculous vanity of the freed man, this double nature is betrayed in everything, his luxury which is punctiliously regulated, his clamorous, yet mean ostentation, everything even to the drowsy charities which he pompously bestows without comprehending or compassionating the misery which he alleviates.

And yet two incurable wounds poison the regal opulence of Lugarto ; one is the baseness of his origin, the other, the knowledge of his own intrinsic worthlessness. Accordingly, by way of a compromise which deceives only himself, he has transformed himself into a Count, and he had some absurd coat of arms fabricated expressly for his use. The very adulation and vanity which exalt him, torture even while they exalt ; he is well aware that all the attentions which he meets with, are accorded to his fortune only ; and that to-morrow, were he a poor man, he would be spit upon ; at times then his fury against fate knows no bounds, but Lugarto is as cowardly as he is malicious, and he revenges himself by ill treating, with the most cruel brutality, those who are forced by dependance to endure his violence. Women—even women themselves have not escaped his ferocity. Well, in spite of all this, in spite of so many odious vices, the world has shewn him nothing but smiles, and the boldest have exhibited towards him no stronger feeling than indifference."

Unable to restrain myself any longer, I exclaimed—

"Then how dare you call such a man your friend ? why have you sacrificed to him our fondest wishes ?—really Gontran I cannot understand you."

M. de Lancry, who was doubtless recalled to himself by these words looked at me with a most embarrassed air."

"What do you say, Matilda ?"

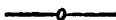
"I ask you how you can call M. Lugarto your friend ? I never will consent to receive in my house so perverse, so odious a man. And is it for him that you have so hastily quitted that retreat, where we were living in so much happiness ? Gontran, there is some mystery here which I do not understand."

M. de Lancry, who had recovered from his emotion, replied with a smile.

"Listen, Matilda, to a very ambitious comparison. Does not the man who succeeds in taming and rendering tractable a tiger or a panther, end at last by conceiving an affection, for the savage brute which he has rendered gentle and obedient ? Well then, though poor Lugarto is not quite a tiger, there is I think, something of this sort of feeling in my friendship for him. Yes, to me he has always been as kind, obliging and devoted, as I have seen him contemptuous, spiteful and haughty to others. I own to you, Matilda, I cannot help being deeply touched by the numerous proofs of affection which he has displayed towards me, and, as you may conceive, with the most perfect disinterestedness on his part. Possessed as he has always been with the fear of being courted for his wealth alone, he feels for me a confiding affection which he experiences for no one else. Well then, tell me, Matilda, does

not my heart—my vanity—I might almost say my honor, command me to treat him with kindness?"

I was already sufficiently acquainted with the expression of Gontran's countenance, to remark in it a kind of constraint while he was explaining to me the reason of his friendship for M. Lugarto, and on the other hand he had given way to a frank and open bitterness when he was describing this man's odious character. Though unable to account for my suspicions, I felt there was some secret in this, and I was only half re-assured by Gontran's explanations. And yet, such is the magic influence of love, that by degrees, as I reflected upon what Gontran had just told me, I discovered a fresh proof of the charms he exercised in this extraordinary influence which he exerted over M. Lugarto. Had I required any excuse in my own eyes for my inability to resist the rare fascinations possessed by Gontran, might I not have told myself that it was an inevitable fatality to which I must of necessity succumb, since the most intractable and the most haughty characters had been unable to escape from it. What shall I say? so blind was my passion that M. Lugarto became almost less odious in my eyes from the reflection, that he too had submitted to the irresistible dominion of Gontran.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### WEDDING VISITS.

M. DE LANCERY had taken advantage of our absence, to have everything put in order at the *hôtel de Rochegune*, and we found it quite in readiness at our arrival. Although this house was a splendid one, I could not overcome an impression of melancholy, when I entered it. Everything, if I may say so, appeared new and strange to me in this residence, and the *unknown* has always, had a chilling effect upon me. Ursula and her husband were gone. She was to spend the autumn at our country seat *de Maran*, M. Sécherin was to take her there, and to return again in order to fetch her, his occupations not permitting a protracted absence.

The day after our arrival, I awoke early, and rang for Blondeau, who soon made her appearance.

"Well," I said to her, "and where are my flowers?" not perceiving the basket of jessamines and heliotropes, which she had brought me every morning since my engagement to Gontran.

"None have come this morning, madame."

"Impossible!"

"I can assure you, madame, that nothing has been brought. I have just come from the ante-chamber."

"Once more, it *must be* impossible, do go back and look, I implore you, my good Blondeau."

She came back without any flowers.

"It was childish doubtlessly, but my eyes filled with tears.

Blondeau perceived it, and said—

"But, madame, we only arrived yesterday, and they must have been forgotten."

Alas! yes, they had merely been *forgotten*, but that forgetfulness pierced me to the soul. In the superstition of my heart, I attached an extreme importance and significancy to that daily proof of Gontran's remembrance. The thing was so simple in itself, it was merely requisite to give an order, and to see that the order was executed, and for that very reason I felt still more keenly the pang which might have been so easily spared me. Blondeau seeing my tears, endeavoured to console me, she confessed that the fears she had once entertained of my happiness, had vanished: M. de Lancry appeared full of attentions and kindness to me, and I was unreasonable to take so trivial a circumstance so much to heart.

Never would I have accused Gontran. I told Blondeau that she was right, that I was very foolish, and that I would dismiss the matter from my thoughts. And then I reflected that perhaps after all it was only the negligence of some of our servants. I awaited the next morning in painful suspense—Again no basket! Never from that day did those flowers appear again. Nothing on earth could have induced me to mention the subject to M. de Lancry. Next to the pain occasioned by the neglect of certain attentions, there is nothing more miserable, nothing more humiliating for the heart than to vent its reproaches at that neglect. Though I suffered long and cruelly from a circumstance so childishly trivial in appearance, I excused Gontran at the expense of my own susceptibility, which was doubtlessly exaggerated and unreasonable. I was grateful to him for having at least passed *gradually* to this forgetfulness, which was so cruel for me to endure. How many men, the day after marriage, suddenly substitute a careless and selfish negligence, for the attentions and little kindnesses of the day before! Poor idiots! they know not of what enchanting pleasures they deprive themselves for ever, for the sake of escaping some of the sweet influences of love, for the sake of loving, as they call it, *without constraint*! they do not understand that marriage becomes a monotonous, coarse, and often intolerable existence, for the want of that perpetuity, of refined attention, graceful coquetry, and enchanting and mysterious delicacy! They do not understand that on those very attentions, so futile in appearance, depend often the

happiness and the peace of life! in a word, they do not feel to what heart-rending humiliation they reduce a woman from the day when they force her to ask herself if it is her name of *wife* which causes this hasty disappearance of kindness. They do not feel with what a generous resignation that woman must be endowed who does not make a fatal comparison between the watchful attentions of strangers, and the neglect of him who ought to be all to her. Alas! I know the world reproaches women who feel thus acutely these little lights and shades of life, with attaching an exaggerated and ridiculous importance, to trifles, to *mere nothings*, and yet these *nothings* almost always suffice for the happiness of women. For those *nothings* they will blindly, proudly, joyously devote their whole existence! For those *nothings* they often forget the privations, the sorrows, the great misfortunes which befall them; for those *nothings* prove to them that they are valued—and loved, there is one thing which ever inflicts an incurable wound on the heart of woman, and that one thing is indifference or neglect. And then, after all, since men in their proud self-sufficiency, treat as childish, what to us is so important, is it generous on their part who are so wise, who are so strong, who are so powerful, to deny us a few poor attentions which would cost *them* so little, and which would be to *us* a pretext at least, for loving them to idolatry?

This long digression was, perhaps, necessary to make you perceive how deeply I naturally suffered from Gontran's neglect. This was the first sorrow which he inflicted upon me.

This day, which had commenced so unfortunately, was destined to be altogether a painful one to me. After breakfast M. de Lancry showed me the list of wedding visits which he had caused to be prepared, and said to me—

"It is useless to put down Mademoiselle de Maran's name, for of course we shall naturally commence our round of calls by a visit to her."

I looked at M. de Lancry with stupefaction.

"My aunt! you cannot mean it, love."

"Why not?"

"What wish *me*—*me* to visit *her*!"

"Really, Matilda, I cannot understand what you mean."

"You do not understand me? Ah! Gontran."

"By the bye, I recollect now, you are thinking of the insane calumny about your mother, but you know we agreed that this was mere madness of your aunt's. You must take people as they are. Sooner than have no one to calumniate, your aunt would slander herself: it is a moral infirmity of hers, which deserves as much compassion as any physical one—You look astounded—and yet nothing can be more simple. Would you attach the least importance to the gabble of a madman? certainly not, would you?"

Well then, do as I do, forget a few foolish words which were dictated by the ravings of hatred : the noble memory of your mother is above such calumnies."

My heart was breaking. At first I was unable to speak a word, and then I exclaimed, bursting into tears—tears, which since the morning I had been endeavouring to repress.

"Never—never will I set my foot again in Mademoiselle de Maran's house ! Do not insist upon it, I implore you—it would be impossible for me to do it."

"Calm yourself, Matilda, calm yourself, and be assured that I am only asking of you what is just, what is necessary. I do not require you to see your aunt frequently, but I desire that you should see her sometimes."

"No, I tell you the sight of that woman would kill me—I have a horror of her."

"All this is mere exaggeration, my dear Matilda, just reflect upon this one thing : the world will be unable to account for your sudden rupture with the relation who brought you up—and who almost originated our marriage. You understand this, Matilda ; all kinds of commentaries and suppositions will be indulged in. Your aunt will be questioned, and she, offended by this want of consideration on your part, will be capable of explaining the matter after a fashion of her own. You, myself, and M. de Mortagne," added Gontran, who pronounced this last name with an evident effort, "were the only persons who heard the insane and wicked words of Mademoiselle de Maran. Fear then lest you should drive her to extremities, she might then repeat to others, that which otherwise would remain a secret with us—and in spite of its unassailable purity, the memory of your mother—"

"And it is *you—you*, Gontran, who propose this to me ! Oh ! what care I for the world ; what care I for the abominable slanders of Mademoiselle de Maran ? Do you think then, that if I am ever questioned, I shall leave unknown the cause which has produced my eternal rupture with her ! No—no—the most bitter vengeance one can exact from slanderers is to proclaim their calumnies to the world, and thus to crush them under the weight of their own infamy ! Ah ! fear nothing, Gontran, the memory of my mother can brave all Mademoiselle de Maran's base attacks, and every virtuous person will approve me when I announce the reason why I will never set foot again in that horrible woman's house."

"Matilda, you speak like a tender and devoted daughter, this is natural enough on your part, but you do not know the world. Believe me, the memory of your mother is now as dear to me as to yourself, and it is in order to preserve that memory pure from all profanation, that, in spite of your repugnance, I absolutely insist

upon your occasionally visiting Mademoiselle de Maran. Once more, it is necessary, it is indispensable ; do you hear me ?”

As he pronounced these last words, M. de Lancry's voice, which had hitherto been gentle and affectionate, assumed a more firm intonation, and his eyebrows were slightly contracted. I feared that I had hurt him by my resistance, I was in despair at this, but that which he, reasonably perhaps, required of me, seemed to me a sacrifice beyond my strength to make.

“Forgive me—forgive me, love,” I said, “pity my weakness, but nothing in the world can induce me to see that woman again. In the name of our affection, Gontran, I implore you, do not exact this from me, I could not do it.”

“I assure you, Matilda, you can do it. It may be a sacrifice—a great sacrifice, perhaps it is, but I ask it of you.”

“Gontran, for pity's sake !”

“I tell you it is necessary, and that you shall do it.”

“Good God ! good God ! do you not know then that—?”

M. de Lancry interrupted me with a violence which he had hitherto restrained, and exclaimed, stamping violently on the ground.

“I know very well what it is, to have endured the insulting reproaches, and the insolent bravadoes of M. de Mortagne ! I know what it is to have been treated in that manner before all your family and my own, I know what it is to have repressed my hatred and my longing for revenge ; in a word, I know what it is to have consented, out of regard to you, not to exact satisfaction from that man, although he entrenches himself behind his protection of yourself ! Well then, it is because I know how much all this has cost me—that in return I entreat you to do what I believe is strictly your duty. Once for all, blindly devoted as you will always find me to every desire of yours which will not be injurious to you, you will find me no less determined in refusing to yield to your caprices.”

“Caprice ! Gontran—good God ! caprice !”

“Your exaggeration of a sentiment which is very praiseworthy in itself, prevents you from judging this question in a proper light.”

“But my heart recoils, in spite of myself, what can I do ?”

“Well then, since reason and intreaties are of no avail,” exclaimed M. de Lancry furiously, “I declare to you that if you do not consent to accompany me to Mademoiselle de Maran's, I will find out M. de Mortagne's residence ; I know how brave he is, and I know, that in spite of his resolution not to fight, there are some insults he will not endure—and if you compel me by your refusal, I—”

“I will go to Mademoiselle de Maran's,” I exclaimed, bursting

into tears, and taking my husband's hand between my own, almost with terror, and as if to tear him away from some great danger.

Some one knocked at the door of the drawing-room in which we were, and I retired into my bed-room to wipe away my tears.

I heard a *valet de chambre* tell my husband that the Count de Lugarto was waiting for him. Gontran came to me, and with a complete change of voice spoke to me affectionately and told me to let him know when he should bring M. Lugarto whom he wished to introduce to me.

"But I am crying," I said, "for heaven's sake let this visit be postponed."

"Quick, quick, dry those beautiful eyes," said Gontran, with apparent gaiety, "or I shall this minute bring you my tame tiger. While you are recovering yourself I shall go and make him admire our house, and I will send presently to know if you are able to receive us."

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### M. LUGARTO.

I DRIED my tears, and awaited this unseasonable introduction. No feeling of bitterness against Gontran entered my bosom for a minute. I felt assured that he looked upon things in one point of view, while I did in another, doubtless I was wrong, as he said so, and it was my duty to yield to his judgment. The bare idea of a meeting between M. de Mortagne and M. de Lancry, filled me with terror. In short, then, as invariably afterwards, when I reflected upon the cruel sacrifice I was about to make to the wishes of Gontran, when I reflected upon all the sufferings which I should endure in the presence of Mademoiselle de Maran, I comforted myself by the thought that my husband would be pleased with my resignation. Thenceforth I understood that great, that terrible truth, so true that it resembles a paradox.

When a woman loves passionately, the most unjust commands, the most barbarous treatment, far from diminishing her love—raises it to a still higher pitch of exaltation, she piously kisses the hand which strikes her, like those martyrs who in their enthusiasm of pain, thanked God for the tortures which he imposed upon them."

Presently a servant came from M. de Lancry to know if I could receive him and M. Lugarto. I replied by a request that they would come to my apartments, and a few minutes afterwards Gontran and his friend made their appearance. The portrait which





Introduction of Luquero to Manila

my husband had drawn of the latter personage, seemed to me to be striking in the resemblance.

M. Lugarto's figure was slender, and he was dressed with more costliness than taste. It was easy to trace in his features, though agreeable ones in themselves, the primitive type of his race, his complexion was pale and yellowish, his nose flattish, his eyes of a glassy blue, and his hair dark. His unhealthy countenance wore an expression of self-sufficiency, cunning, and maliciousness, which disgusted me at first sight.

"My love, allow me to introduce M. Lugarto, the best of my friends."

"I bowed without being able to utter a syllable.

"Lancry had certainly told me, madame, that you were a charming person, but I perceive that all his praises were far beneath the reality," said M. Lugarto, in an easy, familiar, and patronising kind of manner.

I made no reply.

Gontran made me a sign of impatience, and hastened to say to his friend, with a smile.

"I who am not so modest as Madame de Lancry, I who enjoy her successes, as if they were my own, I, my dear Lugarto, confess that I am delighted with your opinion."

"And you are right, my good fellow, for you know I do not catch fire very easily. Therefore if I assure you that I never saw anything more fascinating than madame, it is nothing but the truth. But I shall tell you with the same frankness that it is very dangerous for your friends to see so rare a treasure."

"Ah! take care, my dear Lugarto, after having commenced so happily you are now beginning to fall into exaggeration," said Gontran, who was embarrassed at my silence.

I felt on the rack, making, however, a desperate effort, I said with a freezing air to M. Lugarto—

"You are just arrived from London, sir, I believe?"

"Yes, madame, I had been to the Spring races."

"You behold, my love, one of the habitual victors of Newmarket and Epsom. Lugarto's race horses are celebrated in England," quickly said Gontran, to set the conversation a foot. "Will you not bring some of your stud here for the Bois de Boulogne and Champ de Mars meetings?"

"Pooh! your French horses are not worth taking the trouble to beat, and besides none of you can afford to bet sufficiently high," contemptuously said M. Lugarto, addressing himself to me. "There is a *matinée dansante* the day after to-morrow at the English Embassy, pray come to it, all Paris will be there. It will be quite delightful—especially if *you* are there."

"I am not aware, sir, whether it is M. de Lancry's intention to be present at the British Ambassadors's party."

"Oh ho! my good fellow, you are a tyrant then, it appears, since your wife waits for your orders to know where she is to go to?" And turning to me M. Lugarto added—"Now take my advice, and as far as your own pleasures are concerned, always do as you like, and put your dear Lancry at once into his proper place. There is nothing more disagreeable than these devils of husbands when they have once been suffered to get into bad habits."

I looked at Gontran, and the only reply I made to these impertinent vulgarities uttered in a tone of impudent assurance, was in these few words—

"Is the *Musée* open yet, sir?" I was desirous of letting M. Lugarto perceive, by this sudden change of conversation, that I considered his pleasantries in extreme bad taste.

M. Lugarto, who was doubtlessly accustomed to a different kind of reception, appeared piqued, and said to Gontran.

"It seems, my good fellow, that we are playing a game of cross purposes with Madame de Lancry. I am talking to her about the tyranny of husbands, and she replies by a question concerning the *Musée*."

"Why the fact is, my dear Lugarto, that you are a rather puzzling personage, and your conversation is apt to astonish a little at first, you were born a century too late, you should have made your appearance in the time of the Regency—and besides, my love," said Gontran to me, "you must not judge Lugarto by his strange words, he is a good deal better than his conversation, but it is an understood thing, that he may do or say anything—he has been so spoilt. Come, come, Lugarto I will engage to make your peace with Madame de Lancry."

"I should be sorry to have displeased you by a bad joke," resumed M. Lugarto, smiling, but with an air of constraint, and without addressing me as *madame*, a kind of familiarity which seemed habitual to him, and which I thought excessively improper. I was on the point of giving him a very harsh answer, but I restrained myself, and replied—

"I only thought, sir, that you were in too great a hurry to place me on the same footing of intimacy which exists between yourself and M. de Lancry."

"Why, you see, one is always in a hurry to enjoy those advantages which one desires most keenly, and I trust you will pardon me from consideration of that motive," said M. Lugarto, smiling convulsively as he spoke; and he then gave me a cold, gloomy look which almost terrified me."

I instinctively felt that I had, within the last few minutes,

created an enemy. My husband appeared deeply annoyed, and desirous of renewing for the second time the conversation, which I designedly suffered to drop in order to escape as soon as possible from so insupportable a visit. Gontran said to M. Lugarto, whose impertinent assurance was not in the slightest degree disturbed,

"Have you seen the hot-house into which Madame de Lancry's apartment opens? You must give us your advice as you are so great an amateur of flowers yourself. Will you come, Matilda?"

I was about to refuse, but obeying an imperious sign of Gontran's, I accompanied him into the parlour which communicated with the hot-house in question.

"It is horribly arranged!" exclaimed M. Lugarto, when he had examined it. "Your architect knows nothing about it. It is built over a vault, so that the cold air passes beneath it, and you will never have the proper temperature. That is just like the French, they try to ape opulence, and are compelled to be economical in their very luxuries!"

M. de Lancry colored up violently, but he replied with an effort at self-command.

"You are very severe upon M. de Rochegune, the former proprietor of this house, my dear Lugarto, for on our taking possession we found this hot-house ready built."

"Rochegune! Rochegune!" said M. Lugarto. "I know him very well, I met him at Naples. The Countess Bradini was my mistress at that time—Rochegune got her away from me, but he did not enjoy his triumph long. By means of certain forged letters, and you know I am a dead hand at forging letters—the husband—"

"It is oppressively hot here, my love," I said to M. de Lancry, interrupting M. Lugarto, whose cynical remarks disgusted me—"will you return into the drawing-room?"

"Pardon me," said M. Lugarto. "I am desirous of measuring this hot-house with my cane, as nearly as I can, for I should like to send you some magnificent Brazilian passion flowers, and some other very rare plants, which I sent for from Holland, and I must see if there is room for them here."

"I am much obliged to you sir, sir, but I am quite satisfied with the flowers which this hot-house already contains."

"Nonsense! those flowers are hideous! just like that M. de Rochegune's taste. When people do have things they should have them in perfection. For instance, Lancry, this very winter I wished to procure some equinoctial plants from Holland, and how do you think I set about it? why I had an enormous waggon constructed, with glass windows, and fitted up inside like a hot-house, with a small vapour stove, and the whole was so perfectly well

arranged, that although the waggon travelled with post horses all the way from the Hague, not one of the glasses was broken. A couple of gardeners accompanied this travelling hot-house, in another carriage, and everything arrived here all safe and sound as if by magic."

"It must be owned that the idea was a very ingenious one," said M. de Lancry. "But then your genius, Lugarto is decidedly an inventive one."

"What would you have? it is not sufficient to possess money, but you must also have the talent to spend that money in a proper way. There are so many people who do not even know how to spend the fortune which they do not possess!"

"Spend what they do not possess! you are speaking in riddles, my dear Lugarto."

"Oh! you think so, do you, my dear Lancry?"

A strange look seemed to me to pass between Gontran and his friend, during a silence of some seconds. My husband was the first to speak, and said, smiling, but with embarrassment.

"I understand you—in that sense you are right. But if you please we will return into the drawing-room. I really fear lest the heat should prove injurious to Madame de Lancry."

M. Lugarto finished measuring the height of the wall with his cane, and said—

"My passion flowers will do admirably well in here, I will add also some very rare plants of the orchis tribe, with reed baskets to hang them up in. You will at least have a hot-house decently supplied with flowers. It is true the house is so vilely built that everything in it will die, but I shall be delighted at this, for it will give me the opportunity of renewing your supply of plants more frequently."

We then returned into the drawing-room. I hoped this interminable visit was now to end, but it was quite the contrary. M. de Lancry pointed out to M. Lugarto a rather pretty view of Venice, by a modern artist, and said to him.

"You are a *connoisseur*, what do you think of that?"

"It is by no means bad. Did you give much for it?"

"No, that picture was sold with the house."

"That is the best way of purchasing pictures, for these rascals of artists, who are never satisfied, charge you twice as much as their daubs are worth, when you give them orders, and when they know you are rich. I was formerly fool enough to pay them in advance, and I had accordingly often great difficulty in getting my picture out of their clutches. And such a picture! When they had once devoured the money, the hungry vagabonds did not trouble themselves about anything further. But now—tit for tat is my principle with these gentry, I pay them when I am satisfied,

and when I am not content I make them re-touch, alter, and do over again, till I *am* pleased. At least by acting thus, I escape being robbed."

I was indignant at this brutal insolence, and could not help saying—

"Ah! sir, you are revealing to me one of the painful sufferings of genius, which I was far from suspecting! And can *you* find artists who will paint for you?"

"Find them indeed, yes, and first rate ones too. 'They toady me to death when I go to their *ateliers*, they ask my advice even for pictures which they are painting for other people, and they pretend to listen to what I say, in order to flatter me. Upon my soul I don't know what the rascals would not do for some *billets* of a thousand francs."

I could not restrain myself any longer. I remembered what Gontran had said to me about M. Lugarto's rage at possessing neither advantages of birth or person, and I said to M. de Lancry.

"God bless my soul, love, this gentleman's words put me in mind of a very touching story of a *great artist* and a *great nobleman*, which your uncle, the Duke de Versac, has told me more than once. It was a story about Greuze and M. de Penthièvre, did you not ever hear him tell it?"

"No, at least I do not recollect it," replied M. de Lancry.

"Pray tell it us, I have some pictures done by Greuze, and it will interest me," said M. Lugarto.

"The story your uncle told me, love, was as follows," I continued, addressing Gontran, "the Duke de Penthièvre was passionately fond of the fine arts, and he patronized them like a great nobleman worthy of understanding that there is a close affinity between genius and ancestral distinction of family, because they are two magnificent privileges which only God or history can bestow upon upon you, and which all the treasures of the earth cannot acquire or replace."

I looked at M. Lugarto who grew red with anger, and I continued—"The Duke de Penthièvre then was tenderly attached to Greuze. You are aware that the inexhaustible kindness of that excellent prince, was only equalled by the superiority of his refined and exquisitely graceful mind. When he went to inspect the first pictures which Greuze did for him, and for which he paid with royal liberality, he said to the great painter, with that enchanting manner which is the exclusive privilege of real aristocracy—'My dear Greuze, I think your pictures admirable, but I have one request to make of you—' 'I await your orders, monseigneur.' 'Well then,' said the prince, with a kind of timid hesitation, and as if he really were asking a favor—'well then, I wish you would write with your own hand, at the bottom of those pictures *given*

by *Greure* to his friend the Duke de Penthièvre, and then posterity would know that I had been the friend of a great painter!" Confess," I said to Gontran, while I remarked with pleasure that I had not missed my mark, and that M. Lugarto could not conceal his annoyance. "Confess, that nothing could be more delicate, more charming, than this conduct of the prince."

"Yes, charming, certainly," said M. de Lancry with embarrassment, making me a sign of impatience, and glancing at M. Lugarto, who with down cast eyes stood biting the head of his cane. In spite of my wish not to displease Gontran, I continued—

"Does not such a trait as this, love, exalt at the same time, the great artist who was capable of inspiring such a sentiment, and the truly noble aristocrat who was capable of feeling and expressing friendship in such a manner?"

Gontran had endeavoured to interrupt me by repeated signs, but I was too indignant with M. Lugarto to resist the pleasure of mortifying him. I fully succeeded, as I perceived by the man's paleness, and by a fresh glance of hatred which he cast towards me, a dark, cold glance which sank into my very heart like lead. M. Lugarto, nevertheless, was not disconcerted, and he continued with imperturbable assurance.

"I never heard this anecdote of the Duke de Penthièvre; it is a vastly pretty one, but it does not convert me. I prefer not to be taken for a fool by these painting fellows, and not to give myself the trouble of having any dealings in delicacy with them. By the bye I happen to have a view of Naples by Bonnington, which would be just the thing as a companion to your view of Venice, my dear Lancry, and I will send it you with the flowers, which I have promised your wife."

"My dear Lugarto, I entreat you—"

"Nonsense, what are you making a fuss about a wretched picture for, and between friends too, what do you mean?"

"Well then, I agree with you, friends should *not* make a fuss about a picture. Allow me, therefore, to send *you* my view of Venice, which will be just as good a companion to *your* view of Naples."

"Upon my word, my good fellow, I am fairly caught in my own net, and so I will accept your present, and with so much the more pleasure, because the picture comes from Madame de Lancry's apartment. Good bye, till to-night, when I shall see you for a minute at the club."

"I hardly know, I have several visits to pay with Madame de Lancry."

"What do I care about your visits? I tell you I *must* see you to-night. You know why."

"Oh! yes, I forgot—you are quite right, I shall see you to-night

then, but it will be rather late." replied M. de Lancry, with a certain air of embarrassment.

"You are not offended," said M. Lugarto to me, offering me at the same time his hand.

Although this English custom was not as yet very usual in society, it offended me less than the audacity of M. Lugarto.

Instead of taking his offered hand, I only replied by a cold and ceremonious curtsy.

"You are determined not to make peace then? Well, my good fellow, your wife declares war against me," said M. Lugarto to M. de Lancry. "This is very wrong of her, for she will end by finding out that I am not so black as I am painted. It is a clear defiance, so look to yourself my good fellow, I shall perhaps be forced to play the gallant to your wife in order to remove the prejudices. You see, Lancry, I do not take you unawares, like a traitor, but I give you fair notice."

"You will always be the most crack-brained fellow that I know," replied Gontran, taking him by the arm and leading him away.

I was still more stupified at Gontran's patience than at the other's impudence. I was endeavouring to penetrate the secret of the influence which he exercised over Gontran, when the latter re-entered the room. For the first time I perceived that his handsome features were disfigured by an expression of rage.

"Good God! madame," he exclaimed, violently slamming the door. "I had never before seen you put into practice that malicious disposition, which I had heard attributed to you in the world! But I think you might have chosen some other victim than my best friend. If you had perfidiously calculated the malice of each word that you uttered, you could not have wounded him more cruelly. I told you yesterday, in confidence, that Lugarto bitterly regretted his want of nobility, and his possessing no other value but his millions, and then you complaisantly dilate upon the advantages of an aristocratic birth, and of genius!!! In spite of his smiles, he went away furious—I know him well—he is furious, I tell you."

"What, love, do *you* defend him? Is it *you*, *you* who reproach me for having made that man feel the impropriety of his manners?"

"God bless my soul! madame, I told you beforehand that his manners were perhaps rather too familiar, and that you would oblige me if you would excuse them, on account of the friendship that exists between us. I am sorry to see, that in spite of my recommendations, you do everything you can to irritate him, for, I repeat it, he is highly irritated."

"And may I ask you what cause you have to care for M. Lugarto's anger?"

"I do not choose to alienate a friend—an intimate friend, and

one to whom I am sincerely attached. Do you hear me, madame?"

"Do you say, you are attached to that man, Gontran? I would fain believe you, but I cannot. There is nothing in common between such noble feelings as your own, and the brutality of M. Lugarto. And then, I do not know why, but when you talk of the friendship you entertain towards him, your features become contracted, your voice has a tone of bitterness, and one would say that quite a contrary feeling was at work in you towards him."

These words, which I uttered almost at hazard, seemed to produce a terrible effect upon M. de Lancry. He stamped violently on the ground and exclaimed, while his lips trembled with rage.

"What do you mean by that, madame? what do you mean by that?"

I was terrified, my courage failed me, I burst into tears, and exclaimed to Gontran—

"Forgive me, love, forgive me, I did not intend to say anything that could wound your feelings, only I cannot understand—"

"You have nothing to do with understanding, all you have to do is to obey me, without putting an interpretation of your own upon my words, without searching into my secret feelings. If I tell you that M. Lugarto is my friend, if I request you to treat him accordingly, you ought to believe me, and to obey me without reasonings or reflections."

"Do not be angry, Gontran, I *will* obey you, only let me tell you how much it costs me to do so. This very day you have required of me two most cruel sacrifices, to see again Mademoiselle de Maran, and to admit into our intimacy a man whose character and manners must inspire a profound aversion in all those who do not, like yourself, excuse M. Lugarto with the indulgence of friendship. Once more, love, do not think I will break my promise, because the sacrifice I have to make is a painful one. The greater the more painful, these proofs of devotion which you require from me, the more clearly, I hope, will they attest in your eyes, the fervour of my love. Forgive me then, dearest, the hesitation which I have displayed. Now I will do everything which you wish in this respect."

M. de Lancry's countenance had by degrees resumed its habitual expression of gentleness, he only appeared now to be overwhelmed with melancholy reflections. He took my hand, and said to me with kindness.

"It is my turn, Matilda, to ask your forgiveness for my violence. But once for all believe me, oh, believe me truly, that I am asking you nothing which is not indispensable for your happiness—I dare not say for my own."

"Ah! love, you need invoke no other reason, that one alone will always be sufficient to persuade me."

The carriage was now announced, and we set off to pay a visit to Mademoiselle de Maran.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE PRINCESS KSERNIKA.

M. DE LANCRY did not speak a word on our road to Mademoiselle de Maran's, and he seemed completely absorbed in melancholy reflections. My heart failed me when the carriage stopped before the door. I implored Gontran at least to postpone the visit, but he merely replied with a gesture of impatience. I saw several carriages standing in the court-yard, and I was almost glad of it, for I fancied that thus the first interview with my aunt would be a less painful one. What was my surprise on entering the drawing-room to find M. Lugarto there ! I found also the Princess Ksernika, who had been at the opera, on the night when I was there with Mademoiselle de Maran, in the box belonging to the Gentlemen of the Chamber.

"Good morning, good morning, my dear girl," said my aunt in the most affectionate manner possible, and getting up to embrace me.

I shuddered, and was on the point of repulsing her, but at a look of Gontran's I resigned myself.

"Upon my word she is more beautiful than ever," said Mademoiselle de Maran, examining me with the utmost solicitude. "Well, well, that is natural enough, happiness is always so becoming. And Gontran knows better than any one how to lavish that kind of embellishment." Then addressing Madame de Ksernika, she continued—"Allow me, my dear Princess, to introduce to you, my niece, nay, my adopted daughter, Madame de Lancry."

The Princess rose from her said, and said to me with much gracefulness—

"We were beginning, madame, to think M. de Lancry very selfish, but doubtless it was only the envy of the world which induced it to blame him."

I bowed to Madame de Ksernika, and sat down near her.

She was a very pretty woman, fair, tall, and slender, her figure was enchanting, and her features, which were extremely regular, almost always wore a haughty, displeased, or *ennuyée'd* expression, she usually kept half shut her large, blue, and somewhat weary-looking eyes. This habit of hers added somewhat to a imperious manner of carrying her head, gave her an air which was more con-

temptuous than dignified. A Pole by birth, she spoke French without the slightest accent, but with a kind of slowness and indolence that were almost Asiatic. Though superbly elegant she took more pains with her dress than with her person.

Scarcely had I sate down by the Princess, when M. Lugarto came and sate down behind me, and said to me in a familiar manner,

"Well! are you still angry? You are determined to have war then?" And addressing Madame de Ksernika, with a glance at me, he added, "Do tell her, Princess, what I gain upon acquaintance, and that it is better to have me for a friend than an enemy."

I reddened with anger, and not daring to reply harshly, from fear of displeasing Gontran, I remained silent. The Princess replied in her languishing voice, and looking haughtily at M. Lugarto over her shoulder—

"You! It would be perfectly indifferent to me, whether I had you either for a friend or an enemy, for I should no more believe in your friendship, than I should fear your enmity."

"Come, come, Princess, you are unjust."

"No, you know I do not spoil you, and I am perhaps the only person that tells you the truth about yourself. You ought to be obliged to me for it, for I don't take the trouble of telling it to everybody. Do you not think, Madame," continued the Princess, addressing me, "that one must value people in some degree to tell them what nobody else dares to do?"

"In that view of the case, Madame," I replied, "it seems to me that esteem and contempt are synonymous."

"Tell us in what way," said M. Lugarto to me.

"Well then, I believe, sir, that one may speak the severest truths without the least regard for the person to whom we address them."

"Do you mean me by that?" replied M. Lugarto with his imperturbable assurance.

"You deserve that the reply should be yes," said the Princess, "do you know I do not understand why men or women either tolerate your impudent and familiar airs?"

"That is my secret and you shall not know it."

"You wish me to believe perhaps in some supernatural power of yours—is that it?"

"Perhaps."

"You are mad!"

"Mad am I?" Well then would you like me to make you first blush up to your eyes, and then to turn more pale than you will find pleasant?"

"That is a very old story," replied the Princess indolently. "I suppose you are going to propose magnetising me! And perhaps

you do not know what magnetism is, for you are not a *savant*, and science is not to be purchased with money."

M. Lugarto had been smiling for some minutes with that malicious and convulsive smile which was habitual to him. I read an expression of spiteful pleasure in his dull eyes, and he said slowly and with a protracted glance at the Princess—

"True, I am as ignorant as a savage, but there are some things which nobody but myself can know, because it requires a great deal of money to purchase *that* science."

"Indeed!" said the Princess contemptuously.

"Yes, *indeed*. And what makes it still more *piquant* is that my science makes not the slightest pretension to appearances, but, like all clever people with small means, I do a great deal. Now, for example, you have no idea what results I obtain, we will say for the sake of argument—with a date, the name of a street, and a number."

"Now for instance: the 12th of December, *rue de l'Ouest*, No. 17, all that don't look as if it meant anything," continued M. Lugarto, "and yet that is quite enough to make you turn to pale from crimson, as I had foretold you it would." He then added so as only to be heard by Madame Ksernika and myself.

"Do take care, Princess, you are an object of attention, don't look at me with such a bewildered air, it is not becoming to you. Your eyes are much handsomer when you keep them half shut," he added with cruel irony.

Madame Ksernika had indeed become extremely pale, and she appeared, as it were, enthralled by the revelation that M. Lugarto had just made to her. At this minute Mademoiselle de Maran was conversing in a low voice with M. de Lanery, and remarking the agitation of Madame de Ksernika, she said to her.

"Are you ill, my dear Princess?"

"Yes, madame, I have had a dreadful headache all day," stammered out the poor woman, scarcely able to recover herself.

"You see it is better to have me for a friend than for an enemy," whispered M. Lugarto to me.

He then got up.

Two fresh female visitors now made their appearance, and the Princess was enabled to leave the room and to conceal her emotion more easily. I was almost terrified at M. Lugarto's mysterious power. Gontron made me a sign, pointing to an empty arm-chair near Mademoiselle de Maran, and I went and sat down in it. My aunt said to me in a low tone of voice.

"Do you believe I swallowed the story of that beautiful Princess *Micomican's* headache? I would wager that yonder *white Negro*" and shewed me M. Lugarto, "has said some infamy to her, not but what she deserves it richly, for, although her husband thrashes

her to his heart's content, and has already broken one of her *arms* for her, the happy pair are by no means quits with each other, and there is a balance of at least a second arm, and a couple of legs due from her to him, that is to say if he feels disposed to break one limb of hers for each of the lovers she's had. But that don't signify, I am disgusted with this Lugarto's impudence. I only consented to receive the brute of a Cræsus in order to give myself the treat of castigating him most effectually."

In spite of the aversion which I entertained for Mademoiselle de Maran I could not help feeling grateful to her for this resolution. The two new visitors conversed for a few minutes with my aunt, Gontran, and M. Lugarto.

"Pray tell me, *M'sieu* Lugarto," suddenly exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, continuing to knit all the time, and in the middle of one of those pauses which frequently occur in conversation, "was that your carriage I saw the other day?"

"Why do you ask?" carelessly replied M. Lugarto.

Mademoiselle de Maran instead of answering this question, replied by another, and nothing, she has often told me, could be more impertinent and contemptuous than such a reply.

"If it was *your* carriage, how the deuce came there to be any arms upon it?"

"They are my arms, madame," said M. Lugarto, reddening with anger, for his otherwise imperturbable impudence was at fault when his ridiculous pretensions to nobility were attacked.

"How much did those arms of yours cost you?" said Mademoiselle de Maran.

There was a moment of most embarrassing silence. M. Lugarto bit his lips with a frown. I looked at Gontran who could not repress a bitter smile, but at a glance of M. Lugarto's he said hastily to Mademoiselle de Maran.

"By the bye, talking of arms, madame, would you have the goodness to lend me your *d'Horier*? I want to look for an account of some of our collateral branches. But, while I think of it, could you not—"

"Don't bother me about your collateral branches," continued Mademoiselle de Maran. "You are putting a stop to a most interesting conversation! Upon my word, Monsieur Lugarto, you have been nicely cheated if you paid much for those arms. I would lay a wager it was a bright idea of your coachmaker's. If so allow me to inform you that those arms are a perfect absurdity. How could you think of trusting those sort of people to make you up a coat of arms? If you did take such a whim into your head, you ought to have set about it more cleverly."

"But, madame—" said M. Lugarto, turning pale with suppressed rage.

"But, *monsieur*, I tell you once more, that your coachmaker and his painter are a pair of fools. Who ever heard, in heraldry, of one metal placed upon another! Take my word for it, poor gentleman, they have had a fine joke at you with their '*stars of gold in a field of silver*,' they probably thought of that as being more rich, and as an ingenious, way of recalling to mind your heaps of piastres and doubloons."

"But, madame, it was not I who invented those arms. They are the arms of my family," said M. Lugarto, rising impatiently from his seat and casting a furious look at Gontran.

M. de Lancry vainly endeavoured to interfere in the conversation, Mademoiselle de Maran did not abandon her victims so easily.

"God bless my soul! God bless my soul! indeed, are those the arms of your family?" exclaimed my aunt, taking off her spectacles and clasping her hands together with the simplest appearance of good nature you can conceive. "Why didn't you tell me that at once? But stop a minute, there is one drawback to that story: they say your worthy grandfather was a kind of Negro slave or something of that sort."

"Madame, you are abusing—"

"And that's the reason," continued Mademoiselle de Maran, going on with her knitting, "and that's the reason why I cannot picture to myself your worthy grandfather with the coronet of a count stuck upon his head. With such a head dress as that, he would be for all the world like one of those nasty savages who carry a ring stuck through their noses, with the utmost possible gravity. Don't you think so?"

I shuddered at the expression almost of ferocity which the countenance of M. Lugarto assumed for a moment, and I was the more struck by this expression, because at the same instant he burst out into a nervous and forced laugh.

"An't that a funny comparison that I have just started?" said Mademoiselle de Maran, addressing M. Lugarto.

"Very funny, madame, very funny indeed, but you must confess I keep my temper admirably."

"To be sure you do! admirably indeed, and I am quite sure that you will not owe me the least grudge. And after all you are quite right, for nothing can be more harmless than my jokes."

"I owe you a grudge?" said M. Lugarto. "Ah! could you believe such a thing? Nay I will take Gontran with me immediately so that we two may have a good laugh together at my '*stars of gold in a field of silver*.'"

"And you are quite right, but don't let that hinder you, my good sir, from keeping your arms and your title, pray keep them, they will do to throw dust into the eyes of passers-by. You re-

quire nothing more for snobbish eyes, as your innocent pretensions to nobility do not pass beyond our ante-chambers. As far as we are concerned, you have in order to dazzle us, upon my word, what is a great deal better than '*stars of gold in a field of silver*,' for you unite in yourself all kinds of excellent qualities both of heart and mind, all sorts of immense sciences, and ingenuous modesties, so that if you were to be as poor as Job to-morrow, you would not the less be a pretty, interesting kind of man, and furiously looked up to, take my word for it."

"I fully appreciate the value of your praises, madame, I will endeavour to repay you for them, and to extend, if possible, my gratitude to the members of your family, and to those persons in whom you feel an interest," replied M. Lugarto with bitterness, and casting as he spoke a look of fury at me.

"I depend upon your promise, for I am by no means selfish," replied Mademoiselle de Maran, with a strange smile.

"Come along Lancry," said M. Lugarto, to my husband.

"I will see you to-night at the club as we agreed," replied Gontran impertinently.

"Yes, but I had forgotten that our man from London will be waiting for us at three o'clock," replied M. Lugarto, with an imperious look.

M. de Lancry frowned at these words, he got up and said to Mademoiselle de Maran.

"Madame, I leave Matilda with you, M. de Lugarto has put me in mind of an engagement which I had forgotten.

I looked imploringly at Gontran, but he avoided my gaze.

"Lugarto will take me," he added, "keep the carriage, I will see you at dinner."

The two women who had been, like myself, mute inspectors of the scene between Mademoiselle de Maran and M. Lugarto, took their departure a few minutes afterwards.

I remained alone with Mademoiselle de Maran.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### MADemoiselle de Maran.

My indignation which had long and painfully been suppressed, burst out at last against this woman who had dared to calumniate my mother in such an atrocious manner.

"That's a lesson that impudent fellow will not forget in a hurry," said Mademoiselle de Maran to me. "He will be so much the more enraged, because I administered, and purposely too, you may believe

me, that same lesson to him in the presence of the two Countesses d'Aubeterre, who happen to be a couple of the greatest scandal-mongers that I am acquainted with. All Paris will know to night the history of the "stars of gold in a field of silver."

"Madame," I said, to Mademoiselle de Maran, "You must be very much astonished at seeing me in your house?"

"Astonished? and pray why my dear?"

This excess of audacity increased my indignation.

"Hear me, madame, nothing in the world but M. de Lancry's wish could have forced me to see you again after the frightful words you dared to utter against my mother; just now, I was afraid of finding myself alone with you, but now I regret it less, for I am enabled thus to express to you all the disgust with which you inspire me."

"Matilda—you forget—"

"I remember, Madame, all your cruelties, I do not forget the miseries with which you filled my cup to its overflowing in my childhood, and youth. And yet I might have pardoned you for them, in consideration of the happiness which has been my portion since my marriage, a happiness to which you—though doubtless involuntarily—have contributed—"

"Involuntarily? no my dear, I knew very well what I was about, and that is exactly the reason why your ingratitude—"

"My ingratitude? This is a cruel raillery Madame?"

"Well—yes—yes—your ingratitude," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, angrily interrupting me. "Yes, you are an ungrateful wretch not to have appreciated the service I rendered you in preventing your husband from risking his life in a duel with that horrid M. de Mortagne."

"Was it necessary, Madame, to have recourse to a frightful calumny in order to prevent such a misfortune? Besides, Gontran had promised me—"

"A fine promise indeed, which he would not have kept—while now on the contrary he will respect the man whom he believes to be your father."

"Now?" I exclaimed—"what do you dare to think M. de Lancry capable of believing such an abominable falsehood? Ah! Madame, I love, dearly love my husband, I feel my affection is powerful enough to resist every trial, even his desertion—and there is only one occasion in the whole world on which my heart would find strength to accuse him, and that would be the day when—But, no, no, it is impossible, impossible? This day he repeated again, that, that frightful calumny was destroyed by its own exaggeration."

"Very well, then, what are you grumbling about? If Gontran does not believe it, if M. de Mortagne does not believe it, what harm

have I done you? I have perhaps prevented a sinister event, and that's all."

"All? madame? And yet you saw yourself I was unable to resist that horrible blow."

I could not restrain my tears while I uttered these last words. My aunt got up, came to me, and assumed a tone of voice that was almost affectionate.

"Come, come, be calm, certainly I was wrong my dear, I wanted to do some good after a fashion of my own, and I went about it clumsily, because I am not used to it. How can I help it? on that occasion perhaps I acted like a viper which fancied itself a leech—and yet some allowance at least ought to be made for the poor viper's good intentions."

This hideous pleasantry disgusted me.

"I know you too well, madame, to believe in a good feeling of yours, your wickedness is not even satisfied with the present but embraces the future and the past. You did not utter those words without calculating their result, and they concealed some odious and hidden meaning which will, too soon perhaps, be revealed."

"Well, and what then?" impatiently exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran. "What do you want to conclude from all that? What is done cannot be undone, can it? Gontran chooses you to continue visiting me, and you will obey him. What's the use of carping at wickedness! It is my nature and I am too old to change now. Either my hatred of you is extinguished or it is not. If it is you have no cause to fear me, and your reproaches are useless, if it is not, all that you can say amounts to nothing. You can't hurt me, and I can hurt you, so don't attempt to combat. I can do, and I know a great many things. You have seen how nicely I trimmed that Lugarto, to whom the world, out of regard to his colossal wealth, and from its own servility, seems to have given a patent for audacity and insolence? now he knows that when I do bite, I bite sharply, and that my teeth leave their marks behind. He will hate me, I expect that, but at the same time he will fear me like fire, for if I take a spite against him, I will dog him, from drawing-room to drawing-room, and won't spare him. So that now I have him under my thumb—the nasty fellow? Recollect then my dear that he will always prefer making my enemies his own, to having me constantly at his heels. You understand me, don't you? "Added my aunt, giving me a look of cruel irony." "So I shall say no more. Only don't exhaust my patience, and behave prettily."

I was overcome with terror—I could not articulate a word. What Mademoiselle de Maran said was but too true. She alone could place herself so far above all the usages of society, as to attack M. Lugarto pitilessly in his vanity, and thus to tyrannise over him by the dominion of terror. I shuddered when I reflected on the pos-

sibility of some monstrous alliance being contracted between this man and Mademoiselle de Maran, an alliance based upon their common wickedness and malice. An invincible presentiment warned me that Gontran, in spite of himself, was subject to the influence of M. Lugarto. To what cause was that influence to be ascribed? of this I was ignorant. While I laboured under these suspicions, I could not but acknowledge that the threats of Mademoiselle de Maran were not vain ones.

Oh! that was a frightful moment in which I felt myself forced to restrain my resentment in the presence of that woman who had outraged the memory of my mother.

"Come, come, I see we are beginning to understand one another, are we not?" said Mademoiselle de Maran, with one of her sardonic smiles. "You will go to the English ambassadress's morning quadrille party, and perhaps I shall go too as *Medusa*—try this Lugarto, and keep him in his subjection to me. Don't you think, my dear, I gave him a nice little specimen of what I can achieve? Mind you look well at his yellow-wax face to-morrow when he sees me—that will amuse you and me too—perhaps I shall sacrifice this Cressus to you, perhaps—it will be the other way. But I say nothing—Those who live will see."

I left my aunt in a state of inexpressible uneasiness, and I recalled what she had said with secret terror. I could see nothing on every side but hatred, dangers, and concealed treacheries. I should have preferred open menaces to Mademoiselle de Maran's sinister half-silence.

I returned home absorbed in these melancholy reflections. In an instant of despair, my thoughts recurred to M. de Mortagne, and then to my aunt, I could not even think of my only protector without a feeling of pain, and without remembering the cruel scenes which had preceded and followed my marriage.

My carriage stopped for a moment before it entered the Court Yard, I cast, as it were, mechanically, a glance at the house which was opposite our own.

At the second floor, through a window curtain which was half raised, I recognised M. de Mortagne sitting in a great arm chair, looking very pale and ill, he made me a rapid sign with his hand, as if to say he was watching over me, and then the curtain was dropped.

I had an instant of unspeakable hopefulness. I felt more strong and less terrified, now I knew I had that friend near me, and I did not doubt he would support me in a case of necessity. I thanked Providence for the unhoped for assistance it seemed thus to offer me.

M. de Lancry had not returned, and I dressed for dinner, recollecting with feelings of bitter regret, that in our charming retreat

at Chantilly, I used also to set off my beauty to the best advantage, and then would come into Gontran's presence, radiant with, and proud of my own felicity

Alas ! scarcely two days separated me from that enchanting past ; and already whole months seemed to me to have elapsed since that happy, happy time !

Seven o'clock struck, and Gontran was not arrived.

I did not begin to feel seriously uneasy till towards eight o'clock, when I made Blondeau enquire of M. de Lancry's valet de chambre if his master had left any order ; he had not done so, and was expected home for dinner.

At half-past eight, unable to overcome my terrors, I ventured to send a servant on horseback to M. de Lugarto's to know if M. de Lancry had not stopped there, and I wrote a note to my husband imploring him to re-assure me.

M. Lugarto lived in *the rue de Varennes*, I desired that the utmost expedition might be used, and I awaited the return of my messenger in a state of painful importance.

Half an hour afterwards Blondeau came in, "Well ?" I exclaimed.

"M. le Vicomte is at M. Lugarto's madame, and desired Jean to be told, all was right, and that madame was to be informed he should not be home till very late."

I was only half re-assured by this message.

To forget me in such a manner, Gontran must doubtless be seriously and painfully pre-occupied, I resolved to wait up for him.

Alas ! for the first time, I experienced that devouring anxiety with which one counts the minutes, the hours ? These sudden thrills of joy which are caused by the slightest noise ; and the melancholy discouragement which succeeds them.

I had sent poor Blondeau to the porter's, directing her to watch for M. de Lancry's return, and to come immediately and let me know. Had it not been for the events of that day, such painful anxieties would have been childish, but all that had happened rendered them perhaps excusable.

At twelve o'clock Gontran had not come back, and then the most insane, and the most exaggerated terrors took possession of me. I remembered the sinister glances which M. Lugarto had cast at Gontran. Without reflecting on the improbability of what I feared. I fancied M. de Lancry was in danger ; I ordered my carriage, and desired Blondeau to accompany me.

"Good God ! where are you going to, madame ?"

"To M. Lugarto's door you must go up and look for M. de Lancry, and tell him that I am waiting for him below, I cannot bear this suspense another instant."

"But madame, do make yourself easy."

At this moment I heard an almost imperceptible noise ; it was the

great gate shutting, and an inexplicable instinct told me it was Gontran who had arrived.

Without thinking of what I was doing, I left my room, and ran to meet my husband, whom I found in the drawing-room, which formed an anti-chamber to his bed-room.

"Here you are! good God! here you are! Has nothing happened to you?" I exclaimed with a faltering voice and seizing his hands.

"Nothing, nothing at all, but let us go into your room," replied M. de Lancry, attracting my attention, by an angry glance, to his *valet de chambre*.

I understood the impropriety of such a scene before our servants, but my first movement had been an unreflecting one. I was afraid of having annoyed Gontran, and my heart misgave me when I alone with him. I now first remarked that he was very pale, and in a state of great emotion.

"Good God! Gontran, what has happened to you?" I exclaimed.

"What do you suppose can have happened to me? Are you mad? Is it not all natural, very natural?" he added, with a look which seemed to me almost one of bewilderment, and with a sardonic smile which terrified me. "What can be more simple? I meet once more my best friend, the tiger I tamed you know. I introduce my dear Lugarto to you, he thinks you charming, you treat him with sovereign contempt. He then goes to your aunt who crushes him with the most bitter epigrams. He, poor man, who is naturally the best hearted, the most inoffensive, and the most noble-minded fellow in the world, takes all these little insults in good part, and laughs at them with the utmost possible good humour, just as I do myself. Indeed nothing *could* be more *piquant* and lively than your epigrams and those of your aunt, and moreover they were so remarkably *à propos*."

M. de Lancry uttered these words in a voice that spoke, as it were, by fits and starts, and which was interrupted by bursts of sudden and nervous laughter, he addressed me almost without seeing me, and walked up and down in great agitation as if he were a prey to some delirium.

"Good God! good God! Gontran, you terrify me. In pity speak—what is the matter?"

My husband suddenly stopped opposite me, passed his two hands over his face, appeared to recover himself, and then addressed me in a terrible tone of voice.

"What is the matter? what is the matter? You do not know then what that man is whom you have so mercilessly satirised? Your infernal old aunt finished just now, what you began so well this morning. Ah! Matilda! Matilda! what have

you done? Unhappy woman! may the consequences of your imprudence be fatal to me only!" added Gontran mournfully, as he left my chamber.

I was about to follow him—but, with an imperious gesture, he commanded me to remain behind.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A MORNING QUADRILLE PARTY.

My night was a wretched one.

As soon as daylight appeared, I sent Blondeau to ask after M. de Lancry. He sent me word back that he was perfectly well. A little before breakfast he entered my room, with a countenance as gentle and good humoured as if the scene of the night before had never taken place.

I remained dumb with astonishment. He took my hand, kissed it with a graceful tenderness, and said to me.

"A great culprit has come to ask forgiveness, love."

There was so much gentleness, so much serenity in Gontran's voice, that, in spite of myself, I was almost re-assured. My husband's influence over me was such, that my features always, as it were, reflected the expression of his, and then I so ardently desired to see him happy that I was sure to accept, perhaps with too great facility, the explanations he was about to offer of his conduct the night before.

"Forgiveness for what?" I said.

"It is very embarrassing, Matilda, for how is it possible to confess—to explain to you so great a crime?"

"A crime! you are joking. But still, tell me—and oh! you are forgiven beforehand."

"I know it—you are so good, and yet I do not deserve that forgiveness."

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday, did I not first make you uneasy by my absence, and then almost terrify you by my return?"

"It is true—your agitation—"

"Good God! my lovely Matilda, how dare I tell you that you have been kind enough to take an interest in a naughty drunkard? There is the terrible word out at last—yes, yesterday, Lugarto kept me to dinner with some mutual friends. I don't know how many toasts were drunk to my happiness and to your beauty, I neither could nor would decline them. Since I gave up my bachelor life, I have thank God, got quite out of the habit of those English

kind of dinners, and so I shall take courage to make this abominable confession to you, I got tipsy thinking of you! you see it was only another sort of intoxication. But alas! the one is as enchanting as the other is disgraceful. Once more, will you forgive me?"

"What were those reproaches you poured upon me yesterday, when you returned?"

"What reproaches?"

"You told me that my taunts and those of my aunt had irritated M. Lugarto to the highest degree, that his revenge might be a terrible one, and that—"

M. de Lancry burst into such a hearty fit of laughter that I believed he was sincere.

"Unfortunate Lugarto!" he replied, "I see I have transformed him into a thorough-bred ogre. Poor Matilda! I should laugh still more if I had not made you uneasy. But, seriously, what terrible revenge can you suppose Lugarto—"

"Why, yesterday morning, love, you seemed annoyed at my harsh replies."

"Yes, certainly I did, for I repeat, that in spite of certain eccentricities of character, I consider Lugarto one of my best friends, and as such I wish to see him sheltered from your witty attacks, my charming little mischief; but it will be a difficult matter, and I see, the world will talk of the wit of the Marans, as it does of the Mortemarts. Yet, I beseech you, do not be too hard on the poor fellow, if not for his sake, at least for mine."

"But, yesterday, you also told me, that you were afraid of irritating him."

"Certainly, because then he falls into endless lamentations, he reproaches me with not liking him, with a want of friendship, in short, I hear nothing from him except—not reproaches, for I would not tolerate them—but complaints, which make me more compassionate towards him."

"And are you quite secure of his friendship?" I asked Gontran with some hesitation.

"The more secure because it is a sentiment which he rarely feels, and because he has no reason to feign it."

I told Gontran the dialogue which I had heard between M. Lugarto and the Princess Ksernika.

"It was one of those jokes people make at masked balls, and only wanted the domino," replied Gontran, "he wishes to amuse himself with plaguing her, and with the Princess it does not the least signify, for she is the best natured woman in the world. By the bye if she pays you any attention pray receive it graciously for she is an excellent friend when she likes, and excellent friends are scarce things. Besides you will see her this morning at the English Embassy."

"Are we going to that *fête* then?" I said sorrowfully to M. de Lancry.

"Of course we are! The Ambassadors sent me a charming letter this morning, to tell me that she had only heard yesterday evening of our return, and that she hoped to have the pleasure of seeing you to-day."

"Well, if it must be so, love, I will go," I replied with a sigh.

"What! sighing, Matilda! why you will be the most charming person there. It is quite a triumph to look pretty in the day time, and then I am so proud of you, and of your enchanting beauty!"

"Alas! love, that beauty belongs to you, but I am more proud of it when I make myself beautiful for no other eyes but yours."

Gontran smiled and said to me, "I guess what you are thinking about—the little cottage again?"

"Thinking about my former happiness—yes, Gontran."

"Well then, look pretty, very pretty, prettier than all the other women. You see I am asking you nothing but what is very easy—and we will think of this whim of yours."

"Shall we? shall we indeed?" I exclaimed in a transport of delight.

"Silence," replied Gontran, "you must only whisper it to my heart lest you should be heard by my reason, for she is very severe, and would say No!"

Blondeau came in at this moment with a square bandbox.

"What is that?"

"I do not know, madame, it was left at the porter's lodge, it is very light, it must be either flowers or lace."

I looked at Gontran who could not check a smile.

I guessed at some surprise. My heart beat violently, perchance it was my beloved and favourite flowers that I was about to see once more.

With one of those childish impulses which are so serious to the heart of a fatalist, and with the rapidity of thought I said to myself. If I find a *bouquet* of heliotropes and jessamines in this box, it will be a propitious omen, and to-day will be a day of happiness to me, if not, this day will be a fatal one.

When I had once thrown this challenge in the teeth of fate, I almost repented my rashness, and I had not courage to open the box.

Gontran perceived that my hand trembled and that I was blushing deeply.

"Well, Matilda, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing," I replied, and repressing my emotion I opened the box,

Alas! my heart was painfully oppressed, and I could scarcely restrain my tears. I found no jessamines or heliotropes. The

flowers which were there in their place were certainly delicious ones, and I had never before seen any like them. There was a large nosegay and two branches of little purple, grape-like flowers, in the centre of each flower there glistened like diamonds, a drop of solid dew, if I may use the expression, and some long leaves of emerald green, glazed with crimson, completed this beautiful wreath, which was of the most exquisite taste, doubtless of extreme rarity, and with which I should have been delighted had it not been for the unlucky wish which I had previously formed.

"How good you are!" I said to Gontran with gratitude.

"They are enphorbias, a very rare flower, and just what are required to set off so rare a beauty," gaily said M. de Lancry, "nothing can be more pretty, more gracefully coquettish, than those two purple branches will look in the midst of your beautiful fair hair under a bonnet of *paille de riz*"

We arrived at the embassy.

It was a magnificent day, the ladies' dresses were extremely fresh and beautiful and the sun's rays, broken, and softened by the foliage of the plants and the clusters of flowers which lined the gallery, cast only a gentle light through the spacious apartments.

Generally nothing can be more gay, more cheerful than these morning dances, where candles are replaced by the sun, and the suffocating heat of winter balls is exchanged for the tepid atmosphere of spring, completely laden with the perfumes of garden flowers.

Almost on my very arrival I found myself in the presence of the Duchess de Richeville, who was leaning on the arm of one of her female friends. I could not help blushing deeply at seeing her. Gontran, however, did not perceive it.

Madame de Richeville said to him with much gracefulness, "I am going to restore you to your liberty in spite of yourself, and carry away Madame de Lancry. Lord Mungo is keeping two or three places for us in the gallery, and he or she must be very adroit who will make him give them up before our return."

M. de Lancry, though he appeared greatly annoyed, could not decline Madame de Richeville's proposal. The Duchess took my arm, Gontran offered his to Madame de Richeville's friend, and we proceeded towards the places which were reserved by Lord Mungo.

His Lordship indeed appeared perfectly capable of preserving and defending them by his own *vis inertiae*, for he was an immensely fat man. When he perceived us he attempted (but vainly) to get up. Madame de Richeville said to me with a smile—"I was perhaps imprudent in confiding our places to his guardianship, only fancy if he should find it out of his power, to restore them to us!"

However, after a fresh effort, Lord Mungo managed to get up, and I and the two other ladies seated ourselves in perfect comfort.

Gontran now withdrew, after having given me an expressive look, so as to call my attention to Madame de Richeville.

On my left hand was a complete shrubbery of camelias, the Duchess sate on my right, so that by turning to my side, she was enabled to converse with me in a low voice, without being heard by any one.

"Good God!"—she began—"do not you think me very bold, after what has already taken place between us?"

"Madame—"

"Do not be angry with me, I want to talk to you about our friend M. de Mortagne. He has been very dangerously ill."

"Is it possible, madame?"

"Certainly, he had suffered so severely, and then the emotions of the other day caused him such intense agitation. He is still very ill, though he is better."

"I know it, madame, yesterday as I was returning home—"

"You saw him at his window, yes, he has gone to live opposite your house in order to be more near you. If you did but know how he loves you!—all his fears. Well, well—no, no, we will not talk any more about that," continued the Duchess, observing a movement which I could not restrain. "I hope that he and I were both mistaken, you seem happy—you have effected a conversion. I am not surprised at it—only I did not dare to hope it."

"I am indeed very happy, madame, as I had foreseen I should be."

"And I swear to you that I also am very happy to have been mistaken in my anticipations. But let me tell you, while we are almost alone, if you have any letters which you wish to reach M. de Mortagne, do not forget to address them to the Hôtel de Richeville *rue de Grenelle*, in case he should be absent for some days. In a word, my poor girl, whatever may happen to you, in whatever emergency you may find yourself, remember that in me you have one true and devoted friend. This seems strange to you, does it not? All I ask of you is to put the friendship which I offer you to the test, it shall never fail you."

At this moment M. Lugarto entered the gallery.

I made a movement of involuntary terror, and drew more close to the Duchess de Richeville.

"What is the matter?" she asked me.

"I felt a sudden chill, madame, there is a great draught of air in this gallery. Madame de Richeville, now, by chance, perceived M. Lugarto, who was conversing with several other persons, and she said to me, pointing to him.

"Do you see that man?"

"Yes, Madame," I replied trembling all over.

"Well then! your aunt is an angel of gentleness compared to

him. He is an incarnation of pride and meanness, cowardice, and cruelty, and yet he is received in society. He has done things which make one shudder. Last year he ruined, ruined for ever, a miserable young woman, Madame de Berny, who is now deserted, abandoned by her family, repulsed by every body; he treated her in the most brutal, scandalous, and cruel manner. M. de Berny, either from weakness or contempt, has wrapped himself up in a disdainful indifference to his wife's fate. Once more has M. Lugarto escaped with impunity! Since men are so cowardly, women at least ought to treat such creatures as this Lugarto, as they deserve. And I cannot conceive why such a wretch is tolerated in society, or even why people answer him when he speaks, for his impudence is as great as his familiarity."

I remained silent. I had a presentiment that M. Lugarto would come up to me. And indeed Madame de Richeville had scarcely done speaking, when he approached, made me a slight bow, and offered me his hand, saying

"Well then you did come to the ball after all? You were right to mind what I said."

Perceiving that I did not take his offered hand, he continued smiling ironically.

"We are still at war then? And yet I was tempted to believe the contrary when I saw you wearing the flowers I sent you this morning."

"I do not understand you, sir," I replied, and once more addressing myself to Madame de Richeville. I asked her the names of two very pretty women who were just coming in. M. Lugarto was not disconcerted, but continued—"You don't understand me? and yet what I say is clear enough. The flowers which you have in your hand, and in your hair, came from my hot houses. I sent them to you this morning, I don't give them to everybody I can tell you! Last spring I sent a precisely similar *garniture*, to pretty little Madame de Berny—and it really brought her luck."

I looked with horror at the flowers for which I thought I was indebted to Gontran, and I was cruelly pained at the idea that my husband had connived with that man to make me accept them. I saw something sinister in his coupling me with that woman of whom Madame de Richeville had just been talking. I could not repress a movement of passion, and in my anger I tore off some leaves from the *bouquet* which I was holding in my hand.

"Take care!" exclaimed M. Lugarto, showing me some drops of white liquid which were oozing out from the stalk of the leaves which had been pulled off. "Your hand is bare, and that substance is a very corrosive one, those flowers are beautiful, but the plant which bears them is a poisonous one."

As it happened, a drop of this white liquid had fallen upon one

of my fingers, I felt a slight smarting pain, and a small, livid spot was left upon my skin.”\*

Doubtlessly I need not have been astonished at the venomous property of those flowers, but when I reflected that they came to me from the man who inspired me with so much terror, I could not help observing a sinister coincidence, and fancying that there was something fatal and deadly even in his very gift. In an agony of fear I threw the frightful *bouquet* into the middle of the camelias which were near me. M. Lugarto smiled and said to me—

“One would say you had been bitten by a serpent, it is a great pity you cannot throw away, to as great a distance, those clusters of the same flowers which adorn your beautiful hair. I am happy, in spite of yourself, at seeing you obliged to retain them.”

“Oh! Madame!” I said in a low voice to Madame de Richeville, “all that is going on here seems a terrible dream, take me away from this place, I implore you, and let us go and look for Monsieur de Lancry, for I wish to withdraw.”

“I am perfectly stupified, replied the Duchess, is that man then an acquaintance of yours.”

“Not of mine, madame, but he is an intimate friend of my husband’s—who introduced him to me, and I dread as much as I detest him. Oh! for God’s sake take me away from this place!”

While I was conversing in a low voice with the Duchess, Monsieur Lugarto was replying in an absent and haughty manner to the polite attentions of some young men, who were great admirers of his luxury and his race horses.

Madame de Richeville was silent for a moment, and seemed absorbed in her reflections, she then said to me with an accent of deep emotion “Be grateful to God, dear child, for having restored Monsieur de Mortagne to you. I know not why, but this intimacy of your husband with Monsieur Lugarto terrifies me—you are fearfully pale—let us go and look for Monsieur de Lancry.”

“Oh yes, Madame, and besides, though it may be a childish feeling, these horrible flowers on my forehead seem to distract my brain.”

I do not know if Monsieur Lugarto heard me, but immediately leaving the persons with whom he had been conversing he turned round at the very moment that I and Madame de Richeville were rising from our seats.

“You are going away then, are you,” he exclaimed, “will you take my arm?”

Making him no reply, I pressed still closer to Madame de Richeville.

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\* The juice of the euphorbia is a very strong poison.

"By the bye, *Madame la Duchesse*," said Monsieur Lugarto, letting his words drop one by one, and attentively watching the effect they produced, "I have a question of no great importance to ask you. Is it long since old Mademoiselle Albin went to the village of Bory in Anjou, to Anselm the farmer's?"

Madame de Richeville was thunderstruck, she turned red and white by turns, just as the Princess Ksernika had turned red and white the night before. Monsieur Lugarto gave me a glance of triumph! Suddenly his features changed their expression, his insolent audacity gave place to an assumption of constrained humility, and he bowed twice with obsequious politeness to some person whom I could not see. I turned round—it was Monsieur de Rochegune! who replying by a distant bend of the head to Monsieur Lugarto's excess of civility, was approaching Madame de Richeville. The Duchess, not yet recovered from her emotion, had not uttered a word; she seemed however to feel intense delight in the presence of Monsieur de Rochegune, and exclaimed—

"Oh, what good your presence has done me, I feel better since you have come."

Monsieur de Rochegune looked at Madame de Richeville with astonishment.

"Good God, Madame, what is the matter?" he replied.

"Nothing but my own folly. You know I believe in omens. Madame de Lancry is equally superstitious, and we have been frightening ourselves to death about nothing—but all our foolish visions quickly vanished away when we saw you, *you are, par excellence, the wise and rational man!*"

When Madame de Richeville mentioned my name, Monsieur de Rochegune made me a respectful obeisance. I had not seen him since the touching scene of gratitude of which I, my Aunt, and Gontran had been witnesses in his house. I thought him much changed, and his countenance, in which gentleness and gravity were blended, acquired a character of singular melancholy, from the painful expression of his smile.

"You have not been long on your travels, Monsieur; how delighted your friends must be at your speedy return," said Monsieur Lugarto to Monsieur de Rochegune, with an extreme affability of manner, "You will allow me I hope to pay you a visit one of these mornings."

"I should be sorry you took so much trouble, *monsieur*, for I am seldom at home," replied Monsieur de Rochegune in a most freezing manner."

"If my first visit be not successful, perhaps my second may be more so, Monsieur. I am not easily discouraged, when anything is at stake to which I attach great value."

"You are really too good, Monsieur, I am afraid you exaggerate

to yourself the value of my acquaintance : besides I have only now at Paris so modest a *pied-a-terre* that it is absolutely impossible for me to receive any one there but my *friends*," these last words which were said in the driest possible manner, put an end to this dialogue.

Monsieur Lugarto dissembled his annoyance, and anxious, no doubt, to be revenged upon some one, said to Madame de Richeville—"Do not forget, Madame la Duchesse, the information I have given you ; when you wish it, I will do myself the honor of calling upon you," to the great surprise of myself and Monsieur de Rochegune, Madame de Richeville replied with emotion in her voice—"I will be at home, from four to five o'clock to-morrow, Monsieur, if you wish."

"I will not fail to avail myself of so happy a hazard, Madame la Duchesse," replied Monsieur Lugarto, with a bow, he then continued addressing himself to me. "Ah, madame, take care I give you notice that Monsieur de Lancry is a faithless man. I see him over there engaged in a vehement flirtation with the beautiful Princess *Ksernika*, who is very quick at that sort of work I can tell you, for, with her, a caprice quickly grows into a passion, just look at that monster *De Lancry* ! his attention is so taken up he does not even remember you are here."

Effectively, Gontran was crossing a *salon* with the Princess *Ksernika*, she was leaning on his arm and he was whispering to her, smiling as he did so, she dropped her eyes—blushed slightly—returned his smile, and made a little movement of coquettish impatience. Gontran appeared to be urging something upon her, she lifted up her eyes, and instead of avoiding appeared to take delight in sustaining the glance which met her from his—then, as if Monsieur de Lancry had only just perceived that I was present, he made a hasty movement, said something to the Princess with a glance towards me, and the expression of their countenances changed in an instant.

All this had happened in less time than it takes me to write it, and I felt the first pang of jealousy in my heart. Never, never, shall I forget the deep and painful feeling which I experienced when I beheld the Princess return Gontran's smile—strange and cruel mystery ! every faculty of my soul was suddenly and completely taken possession of by jealousy—and it seemed to me that I had been long inured to that suffering, in an instant I felt all the hatred, all the distrust, all the humiliation, of that fearful passion—I did not escape one of its varied tortures. Alas ! jealousy is one of those feelings which at their very birth attain a terrible maturity—Jealousy, like Minerva, springs to life in full armour.

My heart was broken, and my cheek grew red with the glow of fever.

Gontran advanced with the Princess leaning on his arm, he

came up to me in an unembarrassed and cheerful manner, I felt my tears ready to burst, I could only make an inclination of my head, without replying to a few amiable expressions which she addressed to me.

"Monsieur de Rochegune will you give me your arm," said Madame de Richeville, and be kind enough to ask for my carriage."

"You here, Monsieur de Rochegune, said Gontran, offering his hand to the latter. I thought you were on your travels, I hope you will not quite have forgotten the way to your old house, and that myself and Madame de Lancry shall often have the pleasure of seeing you."

"I do not expect to make a long stay at Paris, replied Monsieur de Rochegune, *but* I will bear in mind your very kind invitation, and at all events I will do myself the honor of paying a farewell visit to Madame de Lancry, if she will grant me that favour.

I replied mechanically,—Madame de Richeville and Monsieur de Rochegune left the gallery.

"I feel very anxious to go—for I am somewhat indisposed," I said to Monsieur de Lancry,

"Not yet!" my dear Matilda—the Princess has made her way thro' all the crowd on purpose to find you," Monsieur de Lugarto now approached Madame de Ksernika, and I fancied they interchanged a look of intelligence, the Princess who had been so haughty the evening before, now addressed him with an affability in which there was something of terror. "I suppose I must forgive your ill nature, for you are really a terrible man," she then turned towards me, and added, as she sat down by my side, "I shall take the Duchess de Richeville's place, of whom I was becoming really quite jealous—"

"You are very kind, Madame—but—"

"I am just going to look round the ball-room with Lugarto, said Gontran to me, and I will come back for you presently if you wish it."

Monsieur de Lancry took Monsieur Lugarto's arm, and they both moved away, I remained with the Princess. "Do you know, she said to me, with the utmost gaiety," you have a most delightful husband, I only knew him before by report, for since my appearance in the world, it has always happened that either he or I were travelling—but I fully intend to make up for it this season; in the first place I give you due notice, that we have already got up a very nice little flirtation, and I am almost sorry for it, for I fancy he is a very dangerous man, now I should like to know what you would say if I were to carry him off from you."

The Princess might have gone on talking for a long time, without my thinking of answering her, what she had just said might pass for one of those pleasantries tolerated in society, but yet I was cruelly wounded by every word. My love for Gontran was a feeling

of such devotion, such solemnity, such fervour, that love in short, upon which my life, my whole destiny rested, for its base was, for me, the object of so pious a worship, that the levity of the Princess's language would have hurt me, even had my jealousy not been painfully excited. In any sincere and profound feeling which knows its *own worth* there is a kind of jealous austerity, a fierce perceptibility, and devout chastity, which revolts at the least profanation,—you may conceive then my wounded feelings when you reflect on my isolated situation, the distrustfulness of my disposition, the misfortunes of my childhood, and the unbounded hopes I had formed from my union with Gontran. The Princess, astonished at my silence, continued—"You seem to be quite absorbed in a reverie, Madame, will you tell me its subject."

I was on the point of candidly telling her all my feelings—and entreating her for the sake of my happiness, to give up her coquetry with Gontran—but I renounced this thought when I reflected how ridiculous such a step would appear, such is the world, which has only contempt or sarcasms to lavish upon the expressions of every legitimate and ingenuous sorrow. My pride was now up in arms, words full of gall and bitterness, trembled on my lips, I endeavoured to inspire myself with all Mademoiselle de Maran's malice, I endeavoured, but in vain, to utter some cutting *repartees*! I suffered too much to be witty—being compelled to reply to a second observation of the Princess's, the following foolish sentence was all I could find to say, and I uttered it, with a bitter smile—"I by no means doubt Madame, the power of your charms."

"God bless my soul, with what a sombre and melo-dramatic air, you say that," continued Madame de *Ksernika*, bursting into a laugh. "You surely cannot be jealous—and jealous of your husband too, that would be too delicious. Madame! pray don't give way to such ridiculous weakness, I should be quite in despair if you did, my triumph would be a far less brilliant one, for your jealousy would deprive you of a great portion of your superiority over me,—don't you admire my presumption and vanity. I actually am bold enough to enter the lists against *you*, who are armed with so many advantages. Confess I am quite heroic!"

I was on the rack, and it required all my experience in dissembling my sufferings, an experience which I had acquired during my melancholy childhood to prevent my bursting into a violent fit of tears. Alas! alas! I did not expect to be forced so soon into having recourse to that faculty of concealment, which had been produced and matured by the miseries of my past existence. All the powers of my soul were employed in this self-constraint, I felt that I was on the point of again making a foolish reply, and, in spite of myself, I stammered out these absurd words—"Are you

serious in what you say, Madame?" the Princess laughed more violently than ever, "*serious*, indeed," she replied, "that is quite a school girl's question, certainly I am serious, I dote on Monsieur de Lancry, and you see in me a declared rival, ready to dispute the possession of his heart with you, by every possible means—what a glorious opportunity to carry off so delightful a conquest from so formidable an adversary."

I fixed my eyes upon Madame de Ksernika to endeavour to penetrate the *real* nature of her sentiments, but this I found impossible so varying and changing was the expression of her features, by degrees, however, I recovered my self-possession. I vanquished my emotion, and I endeavoured to assume an air of good humour and light-heartedness.

"But are you aware, madame," I replied, "that you are running great risks, in entering the lists against me?"

"Certainly, and that is just what I am most proud of, for, after all, you are much younger, handsomer, and more amiable than I am," said the Princess, in a sarcastic tone.

"That is not the question, madame, my superiority consists in this, that I have not like you a reputation to maintain."

"What do you mean, madame?" said the Princess, looking at me with surprise, "*your* reputation!"

"Oh! madame, I have mine, as you have yours—there are reputations of all sorts."

Madame de Ksernika looked annoyed, and I quickly continued—

"Yours is a reputation for *irresistible* beauty, established by brilliant, and above all, by *numerous* successes—were your struggle with me to give you a fresh triumph this new conquest would not add much to your glory—while, were you to be beaten, just reflect, madame, who would be your victor, a poor, young, inexperienced wife, who is just entering into society, and defending, in her own homely way, her husband, or if you like her happiness—"

The Princess assumed her air of haughtiness, and replied rather harshly.

"Are you annoyed, madame?"

I perceived by these words that mine had struck home—and I experienced a sensation of bitter joy.

"Not at all, madame, for we are only joking, I believe."

Gontran now returned with Monsieur Lugarto. "Princess," said Monsieur de Lancry, "Mesdames D'Aubeterre and Monsieur de Saint-Prix have made up a party for the play, and supper afterwards, for this evening—would you like to come with Madame de Lancry, me, and Lugarto?"

"I shall be delighted," she replied.

"We have still something more to propose," said Monsieur de

Lancry, "it will soon be six o'clock, the weather is delightful, we might take a drive in the bois de Bologne till half past seven, and go from there to see Arnal at the Vaudeville."

"That will be just the thing," answered the Princess, "unanimously adopted, is it not, Madame de Lancry?"

"I do not feel at all well," I said to Gontran, "and request that you will allow me to dispense with the pleasure."

"You cannot mean it," replied M. de Lancry, "on the contrary, it will do you good."

"You have no idea how delightful Arnal is," added M. Lugarto.

"I entreat you," I said with an imploring glance at my husband.

"Show no compassion, M. de Lancry," said the Princess, "be a tyrant and issue your commands."

"We should lose too much by Madame de Lancry's absence," replied Gontran, with a smile not to induce me to follow the Princess's barbarous advice. "So then," he added with a tone of comic emphasis, "Madame de Lancry I command you positively to come and spend a delightful evening with us."

"If you insist upon it," I said to Gontran.

"Of course we all insist upon it," added M. Lugarto.

"It is all settled then," continued Gontran. "I will go and tell Saint-Prix and Madame d'Aubeterre, and will send immediately to take two *avant-scène*, and the Vaudeville and to order a supper at Vêry's."

"By the bye, now I think of it," said the Princess, "Madame de Serigny brought me with her, and I have not ordered my servant."

"Nothing can be more easily arranged, Princess," said M. Lugarto, "Lancry will employ his carriage in sending to take the boxes, and therefore I will place my own carriage at your disposal and that of Madame de Lancry and Gontran."

"Nothing could be better," said my husband, offering his arm to Madame de Ksernika. "Let us go and rejoin the other ladies who are waiting for us."

M. Lugarto offered me his arm with an air of triumph. In spite of my aversion it was impossible for me to refuse it.

He said to me in a low voice.

"You are miserable at wearing *my* flowers, at accepting *my* arm, at getting into *my* carriage. I am very sorry for you, it is your own fault, why do you treat me so ill, that all my attentions to you become converted into annoyances?"

I made no reply and I passed through the drawing-rooms which were filled with gay and happy groups. The open windows permitted one to see the garden in all its richness of flowers and verdure.

As I contemplated that cheerful picture, as I listened to the harmony of the orchestra, my heart died within me, the contrast to my own feelings was so insupportable a one. All eyes were upon me, I heard my name whispered with that of M. Lugarto, and I blushed with shame, thinking that all the world had the same contempt for him which I had. I was in despair at appearing on terms of intimacy with that man.

All this, however, was by no means the case, at least not apparently so. The men exchanged a friendly bow, or a few polite sentences with him, and several ladies returned his bow with a smile, we stopped for a moment in one of the door ways. The young Marchioness of Sérigny, a lady of the highest station too, came up to M. Lugarto and said to him.

"I am come to present a petition to you in the name of a whole host of pretty women."

"Let's hear what it is all about," asked M. Lugarto.

"We want you to give us a delightful ball or two this spring, in celebration of your return. You are so clever at getting up a fête, it would be quite delicious!"

"Oh yes! oh yes! pray give us some balls this spring Monsieur Lugarto," added some young ladies who now joined Madame de Sérigny.

M. Lugarto turned towards me, and said to me in a loud voice, and with his insulting familiarity of manner.

"Come, come, make up your mind. Do you wish me to give you some balls, yes or no? Fix the time, and the number, and I will obey you—*your* mind."

I turned purple with shame, every eye was turned upon me, I remarked more than one malicious smile, my heart misgave me, I could not utter a word.

"Come, Lancry, answer for your wife," said Lugarto to my husband, who was just before us. "I am asking her whether she chooses me to give some balls, and she won't answer me, yes or no."

"Give them just the same," cried Gontran. "I am sure it is only a motive of discretion that prevents Madame de Lancry from saying yes."

"Well then, ladies, since it pleases Madame de Lancry, I will give four balls."

"Two balls in the morning and two evening ones with illuminations in your magnificent garden. Oh! it will be enchanting!" said Madame de Sérigny.

"Perhaps so," replied M. Lugarto, "but I must consult the taste of a lady friend of mine," and he gave me an expressive glance—"in whom I have the greatest confidence."

"Monsieur Lugarto you are always a delightful man!" exclaimed several ladies.

"Of course I am when I give you balls," he replied insolently. We now went to look for our carriages.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE SUPPER.

I WAS thunderstruck at the impudence with which M. Lugarto had addressed me, and at the brazen indiscretion with which women, moving in the first circles of society, implored, in their ungoverned thirst for pleasure, such a man to give them fêtes, a man whom they ought to despise.

M. Lugarto's carriage drove up.

"No body ever had such horses as yours," said the Princess.

"They ought indeed to be magnificent, judging from their price," said Gontran, "that turn out cost him fifteen thousand francs."

We set off for the *bois de Boulogne*. M. de Saint Prix, and Mesdames d'Aubeterre, followed in another carriage.

My spirits were painfully depressed, and I was overwhelmed by all the various emotions of this day of *pleasure*.

That factitious and feverish strength which had for a moment sustained me, was now completely vanished. Vain, was the resolution I had taken to contend with the Princess in wit, spirits, and gaiety. Putting vanity out of the question. I had perceived that I was able to embarrass her, but I had no longer the courage to attempt it.

I fell into a kind of painful languor, and resigned myself to my fate. I dwelt upon the thought that I was offering as a sacrifice to Gontran, my participation in the pleasures (!) of the evening, pleasures which were a torture to me.

It was with a kind of bitter consolation that I felt, in spite of all the painful sufferings caused by jealousy, that my love for Gontran had not experienced the least shock. I do not think I could compare this impression of mine to any thing more faithfully than to the one which a mother feels when she weeps over the errors of an adored child—she detests the faults, while she still adores the culprit.

Oh! there is in the invincible love of women, a feeling of magnificent charity—too exalted for the intelligence and faculties of the vulgar to comprehend? The more a woman suffers, the more desirous is she to spare suffering to him who occasions her own, and

she puts in practice with a pious resolution, that precept of the Gospel, which is so sublime a one in its simplicity. "Do not unto others what you would not should be done unto you."

I recollect that this thought occurred to my mind at the moment when the Princess was laughing long and loudly at a jocular remark of Gontran's upon the ridiculous figure of a man who was just passing us upon horseback.

There was such a contrast between my ideas and those which had been just expressed, that, at first I almost blushed with shame, but a re-action of feeling soon followed, and I could not help casting a look of withering contempt at the Princess, as I half raised myself up from the seat of the carriage on which I had thrown myself quite back. This did not escape Gontran, he took advantage of a moment when M. Lugarto and *Madame de Ksernika* were leaning out to look at his Royal Highness the Duke de Bordeaux, who was coming back from Bagatelle, to whisper to me in an impatient tone.

"You do not look ill, but out of humour, you will end by becoming famous in society for your insupportable temper; nothing can be more ridiculous; every attention is exhausted to please you, and you repay it all by a most contemptuous silence."

"Gontran, I assure you I am far from well." And my eyes filled with the tears which I could no longer restrain.

"That's right, tears now! That was all you wanted to complete you," he said with a shrug of his shoulders.

I drooped my head, put my handkerchief to my lips and concealed my tears.

Doubtless Gontran regretted his movement of impatience, for soon after when I once more lifted up my eyes to him, to show him that I was no longer crying, his glance met my own.

Oh! never, never shall I forget the look of mingled melancholy and kindness which he gave me.

Then his features suddenly contracted—with a change quicker than thought, his handsome and noble countenance wore for a second the impress of a terrible despair.

I was so alarmed that I could not restrain a slight scream.

The Princess and M. Lugarto turned hastily round.

My husband's features had resumed their habitual expression of gaiety, and he said to me—

"I beg your pardon, my dear Matilda, for being so clumsy, I was very near crushing your pretty little foot."

It was time to go to the play, and we accordingly proceeded thither with the rest of our party, Mesdames d'Aubeterre and their uncle M. de Saint-Prix.

There was nothing very remarkable about the ladies, and fortunately they talked incessantly. The gentlemen were of much

the same *calibre*. I sat down in a corner of the box. M. Lugarto placed himself behind me.

Gontran appeared entirely devoted to the Princess, and she had the bad taste to burst into such inordinate fits of laughter that she brought upon herself several energetic "*chut chut*" from all quarters of the house.

I replied with a few monosyllables to M. Lugarto's observations, and I conversed occasionally with Mesdames d'Aubeterre, who were sitting near me.

The buffoonery of the piece, might perhaps have amused me, had I been in a different frame of mind, but now I thought it insupportable.

Before the last performance we left the theatre to go and sup at Véry's, M. de Lancry sat between the Princess and one of the countesses d'Aubeterre. I had M. Lugarto on my left, and M. de Saint-Prix on my right. I hoped to escape the conversation of the former, by talking to the latter, I was disappointed, however, for M. de Saint-Prix was a complete *gourmand*, he looked upon the supper in an extremely serious light, and scarcely made any answer to my observations.

"Lancry is right, you have a most unfortunate disposition, for you do not choose to know your real friends," said M. Lugarto, in a tone of voice which could reach my ear alone, "but time will wean you from your unjust prejudices."

I made no reply. He continued in the same tone.

"I heard your husband invite M. de Rochegune to come and visit you. I hope you will not let in that original often, he is as tiresome as a rainy day, and I detest him."

I could not help saying to M. Lugarto—

"Doubtless you detest him as much as you fear him, for this morning you were more than polite to him."

"Oh, ho! you defend him do you?" he said, fixing his eyes upon me as he spoke.

"I should feel much flattered in reckoning M. de Rochegune among my friends—he is a man of high birth, rare acquirements, and a noble heart."

"Ah! ah! that's it, is it? well its worth pursuing at all events," said M. Lugarto, with that convulsive smile which, with him denoted always a furious rage.

I did not utter a word. I was firmly resolved to have a final explanation with Mr. de Lancry, on the subject of this man.

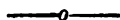
I had a vague presentiment that some treacherous plot was in progress of which I and Gontran were the intended victims, when I recalled the expression of despair, which had for a moment contracted M. de Lancry's features. I gave myself up to all kinds of con-

tradictory suppositions. I could not reconcile his apparent gaiety, and his profound attention to the Princess, with that look of tenderness, despair, almost of supplication which he had given me aside.

This fatal day came to an end at last. Alas ! it was destined to contain as it were, the germ of many future calamities.

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I have been reading over these pages again, and I am still more struck with the justice of this reflection—every event of that day, however insignificant, was cruelly developed afterwards.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### EXPLANATION.

SEVERAL days had elapsed, when the Princess Ksernika paid me a visit. Believing, doubtless that she would not have much the advantage of me in raillery, she contented herself with heaping affectionate words of every description upon me.

Gontran continued to be most assiduous in his attentions to her when they met in society.

M. Lugarto called almost every day upon my husband, and never ceased to persecute me with his odious presence. This man would frequently send me flowers in spite of myself, and in spite of the observations which I had made to Gontran. He asked my husband for a seat in our box at the Opera, for the close of the season, and notwithstanding my entreaties, M. de Lancry complied with his request.

To all my observations, Gontran merely answered.

“Lugarto is my intimate friend. I cannot, and will not break off so old an acquaintance, only to satisfy an antipathy of yours which is as unjust as it is unreasonable. You do not like Lugarto ; very well, you take very good care to let him see it, I allow you to act just as you like, and pray permit me to have the same privilege with respect to him, only for decency’s sake, treat him with common civility when you meet him in society.”

I had already discovered that Gontran’s will was immoveable, and I resigned myself.

Fortunately, I perceived a remarkable change in M. Lugarto’s manner towards myself. Instead of persecuting me with his conversation when he met me in society, he scarcely spoke to me at all.

Gontran had several times compelled me to offer a seat in our

box to the Princess Kaernika also. I still continued to suffer cruelly from my jealous suspicions, and twenty times I was on the point of speaking to Gontran on the subject, but my courage failed me.

I remembered what I had been told about my mother, and the *vis inertiae* with which she fell back upon herself when oppressed with sorrow. I now found that I too possessed this faculty ; I restrained, I concealed my grief, and M. de Lancry never saw me without a calm serenity upon my brow.

At first, I almost timidly questioned myself every day, in order to ascertain whether my love for Gontran had become in the least diminished, and the answer was invariably in the negative.

In the pride of my affectionate devotion, I waited with a kind of painful security, for the moment when my husband would discover the nothingness of that attachment to which he so unscrupulously sacrificed me. Besides, in all except his apparent attentions to Madame de Kaernika, Gontran was kind and affable to me, and he could have no suspicion of what I was enduring, for in my presence he was always cheerful and lively.

I sought in vain, on his features for that transitory expression of despair which had once made so striking an impression upon me, and which had for a moment induced me to believe that his behaviour was the result of some mysterious and irresistible influence possessed over him by M. Lugarto.

I was mistaken, however, in supposing that my feelings were less intense from being checked, and dissembled. My life was an isolated one, I had no confidant, no friend, for Ursula was absent, besides I should have looked upon any complaint against Gontran in the light almost of a sacrilege.

In general, one never complains unless it be for the purpose of excusing one's revenge, or displaying one's resignation,

My love for Gontran was greater than ever, and my resignation was so natural a one that I could not dream of taking any credit to myself for it.

An infinite, an unshared sorrow was gradually accumulating in my heart, and I experienced a singular sensation, the more I became engrossed with that sorrow ; I felt more and more oppressed, as if the vital air were being gradually withdrawn from me. I feared lest an hour should come when my soul would burst its bonds, when in spite of myself my first wild cry of anguish would burst forth, and I should implore Gontran to have compassion upon me.

That hour at last arrived.

For some days I had been indisposed. One morning I said to my husband, "Gontran I am going to claim the fulfilment of a promise which is very dear to me."

"What do you mean, Matilda?"

"You allowed me to hope that we should spend a few days in

our little house at Chantilly. It is now nearly the end of May, and I think the delightful forest air would do me good."

"What, are you still thinking of that foolish whim? Why that hovel was pulled down a week ago. I was informed by my man of business that the steward of the Duke de Bourbon's estates had taken possession of it. There is quite an end to that business."

I had retained a glimmering of hope, and seeing that even *that* must be resigned, I burst into tears. Gontran appeared impatient and said to me.

"Really, my love, it shows a want of common sense to cry about such a childish thing. I told you before that although we are rich our fortune will not allow us to comply with all your caprices."

"Caprices! I have very few, Gontran, and that was to me a holy and consecrated one."

"Once for all, what is done cannot be undone, it is impossible to undo the sale, besides, God bless my soul, all these fancies are only fit for novels. If one was obliged to buy every place where one has been happy, at the end of a certain time one should find oneself singularly embarrassed, with all those commemorative kinds of possessions, whose only value would be the tender remembrances attached to them. Unfortunately in this unromantic age you cannot live upon such unsubstantial property."

This raillery of Gontran's hurt me deeply. I had always believed that he still looked upon those happy days, in a sacred light, and I could not help replying with another burst of tears.

"Alas! love, there would at least have been no second opportunity of spending money in that foolish way, as you call it."

"I suppose you mean to insinuate that you have been miserable ever since then."

"No—no—I am not complaining, I am only regretting those days of bliss when you were more solely my own—when each lived only for the other."

"I shall take advantage of this opportunity," replied M. de Lancry, after a long silence, "to give you some advice which I hope will be of service to you. I do not know what romantic ideas you have formed of marriage, but allow me to tell you what it ought to be in the case of two reasonable people. Like two lovers, or rather like two children, we played at solitary happiness, at *bread and cheese and kisses*—as people call it, but we wore out those pastoral pleasures, for every exaggeration comes to an end at last. We ought *now* merely to see in marriage, a kind of pleasing intimacy founded upon a mutual confidence, and especially upon a mutual liberty; we are people of the world, and we ought to live for the world, and like the world."

"Gontran, do you remember what you once said to me? "Marriage in my eyes is a love and passion, united and blessed by God."

Do you remember what you said to me besides? It would be impossible for me to form those cold and monstrous ties in which the heart has no share."

"I said all that did I? of course I did, and I was quite sincere, for the fact was, that at that time I fancied such a dream might be realized."

"And you were not mistaken Gontran, oh! that hope was no chimera—to me at least nothing is changed—love—passion in marriage is still—or rather would be if you chose—my existence and my happiness."

"That is just like women who always look upon what they desire as actually accomplished. You are strangely mistaken, I am older than you. Perhaps your illusion may last a little longer than mine, but like mine it will vanish, and you will find out that the sentimental love which you feel will have its end like everything else."

"Gontran, in pity's sake do not blaspheme!"

"All that is mere talk, it is better to look well into one's life at once, and one becomes happier in consequence. You yourself are a proof of this. You have been horridly ill-humoured lately, while I am in an excellent temper. Do adopt my views, renounce all these imaginary idyls you have got into your head, and you will acquire that placidity, and indulgence which turn marriage into a paradise instead of a hell."

"Oh God! oh God! to hear this! and from *you* / from *you*!" I exclaimed, hiding my head in my hands to stifle my sobs.

"That's right, we shall have a scene now—oh! what a temper!"

"No! no! Gontran, I will not make any scene—hear me—I will speak frankly to you—yes! I *must* tell you what I have been suffering so long. You are not aware of it, or you could not turn my sorrow into a jest. You are too kind, too generous!"

I took M. de Lancry's hand in mine.

"Well, let me hear it then, speak out, Matilda, if I have hurt your feelings, it was without knowing it. If your reproaches are reasonable, I will beg your pardon, you will forgive me, and 'I won't do it any more,' as the children say," he replied shrugging up his shoulders.

"I expected no less from such a heart as your's, love. You encourage me, your gaiety dispels the painful impression which your words just now occasioned me. Laugh as much as you like at your poor Matilda," I added, after a minute's silence, and trying to force a smile, "she is jealous of the Princess Ksernika—Yes, your attentions to her make me horribly uneasy, and I fancy that you forget me, since you have been so taken up with that woman."

"Is that all you have to reproach me with? and pray what conclusion do you come to upon the subject?"

"That you might make me as happy as I was before, by granting me one favour, love, which it ought to cost you no effort to bestow."

"Well then ! what is it ? let me hear," he impatiently replied.

"I wish to break off the terms almost of intimacy in which we are at present living with the princess—and so by degrees, cease to see her at all."

"That's what you want is it ? Are you mad ?"

"Gontran !"

"What !" he angrily exclaimed. "I cannot be properly attentive and polite to a woman without being persecuted by your jealousy ! What ! you actually have the face to ask me to treat with impertinence a person who is entitled to your consideration, to your respect ; under the pretence of banishing the foolish visions which haunt you ! Why you must have lost your senses !"

"Well then, yes, I shall lose my senses if my sufferings are prolonged. Believe me, Gontran, my apparent calmness conceals much and bitter grief ! By the memory of my poor mother, who, herself suffered so much, I swear to you that what I have been lately enduring is too much for my strength."

"Well, and how pray, can I help it ?" he exclaimed still more enraged, "am I responsible for all the fancies you conjure up to torment yourself ?"

"But if I am really deceived by appearances, put an end to the deception by complying with my request."

"Why it is precisely because the whole thing turns upon appearances which are totally devoid of foundation ; that I tell you once more, I cannot, in mere wantonness and caprice, grossly insult a woman who is a friend of mine and your own."

"But if my happiness and my peace are at stake, Gontran ?"

"Listen to me, Matilda," said Gontran, with difficulty restraining himself. "I have the reason to judge, and the will to execute. It is my duty to do only what I think right and proper, as I told you once before, when we were discussing your aversion to seeing Mademoiselle de Maran again, and to receiving my intimate friend. You will find me inflexible in never complying with any of your extravagant caprices. You may therefore judge from this that there shall be no change—do you hear ? none whatever in our intercourse with the Princess."

"And so you will continue to be as assiduously courteous to her as ever ? And so in society, all your looks, all your attentions will be for her ? And so it will be always your arm that she will take ? She will be still then, all and everything to you ? Oh my God !"

"And you would wish that it should be *you ! you ! always you !* so that at last both you and I should be covered with ridicule ? Ah, madame, if you had not a manner so freezing and disdainful you would be sufficiently surrounded to find many an arm instead of mine—there are a thousand little innocent coquetries perfectly allowable in the world by which a woman is permitted to seek amongst the men

who surround her, those attentions which a husband could not shew without being pointed at—but no! You shew a degree of sullenness and hauteur that drives every one away from you. And—*then*—you complain of being *isolated*! If I were to do as you do, what would become of me, I should be one of those unhappy, jealous husbands who never speak to a woman, never budge from the entrance of the door, and who, as soon as midnight appears, come forward like the spectres in the ballad—to carry off with the air of a barbarian, their wives from their partners? And what is the consequence! That those kind of husbands are ridiculed. Oh, my dear, for you, and for myself, I am quite decided always to avoid acting in that manner.

“And so,” I exclaimed with bitterness, “I am to submit without complaining to these strange laws of society, which consider it a sovereign impropriety in a husband to occupy himself with his wife and to pay those attentions to her which he lavishes upon others! Singular custom which impresses, as it were, the stamp of good breeding upon the appearances of infidelity, which brands with inexcusable ridicule every legitimate and natural attention! You shrug your shoulders, Gontran. These reflections of an ulcerated heart seem pitiable to you, do they not?”

“Once for all, madame, since we live in the world, for God’s sake let us live as people of the world. For my part I am determined to make no change in my conduct and I wish—I should not like to say I *choose*—you to modify your own. It is already painful enough for me to see you receive so ill the attentions of my best friend. But I have given up all hope in that quarter. Luckily Lugarto’s attachment to me is not one of those which are susceptible of being diminished by diseased fancies or an unreasonable antipathy.”

“And I tell you that you have not a more deadly enemy than that man,” I exclaimed, “and I tell you that he is the sole cause of all my sorrows and of your own. The instinct of my heart does not deceive me, he exercises some mysterious influence over you, I know not its causes but it exists, do you hear, Gontran? it exists. Often, in spite of your assumed calmness, I have surprised the expression of a sombre despair upon your features, this is no longer mere suspicion, but an absolute certainty on my part. I hate that man. And you yourself in your own heart, approve me for that hatred—nay, you share it yourself.”

“This is really intolerable! Why, in heaven’s name, madame, will you have it that I condescend to feign a friendship which I do not feel?”

“That is the mystery, Gontran—And if I were not afraid—but oh! why should I be afraid to tell you everything? is not your happiness, is not my own at stake? Well then, yes, that man





THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

“*My dear Sir, I enclose you a couple of bottles of Brandy.*”

domineers over you in spite of yourself, and you dare not confess to me the cause of this tyranny ; why should you judge me so ill as to believe that I could not forgive you everything ? can you feel any false shame towards me ? When I united myself to you did I not elect to share not only your future existence, but if I may say so, your past life as well ? I am courageous, love, I shall find immense strength, immense resources in my affection. If it were to save you, you would find me as brave and as resolute as you see me weak and overcome at this minute."

"To save me ? And from what do you wish to save me ? It is enough to drive one mad !"

"Good God ! how can I positively tell you what ? That man tyrannises over you, that is certain. He has, perhaps, surprised one of your secrets, as he has surprised those of the Princess and Madame de Richeville—how can I tell ? you have been extravagant—that man has a princely fortune—perhaps you have contracted some obligations to him ?"

"And you dare to suppose that for such a miserable motive. I should consent to display a friendship towards him which I do not feel !" exclaimed M. de Lanery angrily.

"I believe, love, that with your submission to the opinion of the world, you are capable of imposing upon yourself the greatest sacrifices in order to make your appearance in that world."

"Madame ! madame !" said Gontran with repressed rage.

"Do not, love, think that I am reproaching you. You have been long habituated to place your happiness in all this brilliancy of the surface, perhaps you think that even I myself should be pained to give up that brilliancy, oh ! how mistaken you are. What is all this luxury to me ? I hate it if it causes you the least grief. This luxury had nothing to do with that heavenly felicity which was ours for so brief a space, and which would be ours, perhaps, still, had it not been for that man's arrival ! What do we require to live in obscurity, in some unknown corner of the world ? you, myself and my poor Blondeau ? Would not such a life be the realization of my ideal dreams ? Did I not live, till our marriage, a life of solitude far from those pleasures which are but a fatigue to me, because my heart takes no share in them ? you are moved, my love, I see—oh ! in pity listen to her who is thinking only of your happiness, and would purchase that happiness at the price of her whole existence. Gontran, on my knees, on my knees, I implore you conceal nothing from me, rely upon me. Put my love to the test, seek in it a refuge and a consolation, and you shall not be disappointed."

I knelt at Gontran's feet. His head drooped upon his chest, his eyes had a fixed look, he seemed absorbed in profound reflections, without replying to me, and hiding his head in his two hands he sighed long and painfully.

"Oh! I see, I see," I exclaimed almost joyfully. "I did not deceive myself, courage, love, courage. Come I will take even an impossibility for granted. Suppose that it would ruin us completely to set us free towards this man, will not my friend Ursula be left to us? Oh! I should have recourse to her with as much confidence as much happiness, as she would, if she had to come to me. When love is like ours—for you *do* love me in spite of your flirtation with that beautiful Princess—can we fall upon evil days? Oh recollect that touching story you told us so charmingly at the opera. Well then we will do like that courageous, that noble-minded young couple."

Gontran rose hastily and said with bitter irony.

"Upon my word you are describing a most enviable existence and one which might well make up for the loss of a great fortune! What a fine life! I am mad to listen to your foolish fancies; once for all you will oblige me by not recurring to this subject again; your suppositions are all nonsense; no obligation binds me to Lugarto, he formerly rendered me some services but those services were by no means of a pecuniary nature. I am surprised that with ideas so romantically exalted as yours, you should not understand that simple gratitude is sufficient to form the links of an indissoluble friendship. To sum up all I tell you, that your jealousy is ridiculous—that your suspicions of Lugarto are absurd, that I am old enough to know how to behave in society, and that you will act wisely for the sake of our mutual tranquillity to take life as it ought to be taken—You understand me!"

My feelings were strange and varied, and I reasoned thus rapidly with myself—"What I wish is Gontran's happiness, my own ought only to be considered, as the means of attaining *his*, if by sacrificing myself, I ensure *his* peace and felicity, I must not hesitate, I will do what he wishes at what ever cost to myself." I cannot yet understand how I so quickly resigned myself to this extreme measure, which formed such a contrast to the complaints I had just made to Gontran.

It appears to me now that this sudden change of purpose was somewhat akin to those desperate resolutions, which—when our lives are in imminent danger—we take with the swiftness of thought.

"I hear you, Gontran," I said, "and I will obey you, my complaints annoy you, I will complain no more. It would be displeasing to you were you to devote yourself to me in society; I will ask it no more; you find a pleasing variety in the attentions you pay to the Princess; I will reproach you no more on that subject, you are pained at seeing that I do not understand the feeling which attracts you to Monsieur Lugarto; I will do all my power to vanquish the aversion I feel towards him; but," I added, unable to repress my tears, "there is only *one* favour that I implore you to grant, allow me to go into society as little as possible, it would

be impossible for me to overcome that coldness with which you reproach me. In spite of myself, my mind revolts at the idea of receiving any other attentions but yours, even if those attentions be but trifling ones—I confess that this is weak and childish, but be generous and forgive me, in everything else I will do what you wish. Well then, are you satisfied and do you forgive me for the irritation I have caused you?" I said to him trying to smile through my tears.

"Poor Matilda," said Gontran with an emotion which he could not overcome, "one must be made of iron to resist such gentle kindness, perhaps I have been wrong."

"No, no," I said, interrupting him. "All that I wanted was the knowledge of what pleased or displeased you, you are right, I *was mad*, but you must not be angry with me, you know I was ignorant of what you wished—but make yourself easy, love, and be sure that this lesson shall not be lost upon me, tell me, tell me now and always, your wishes with the greatest frankness and the greatest candour, but then, if sometimes, though oh how rarely I should, in spite of all efforts, be unable to obey you, you will be kind and indulgent, will you not, when you are convinced it is too great a task for my strength? You will not scold me any more, will you?"

Gontran looked at me with astonishment almost with uneasiness, he hastily took my hand, which he found icy cold, indeed my strength was now beginning to fail me, the resolution which I had just attempted was one of despair, it was not now the wish to keep my promise, which was wanting, but the sheer physical strength to endure so cruel a scene. I should have fallen to the ground had not my husband caught me in his arms, a kind of painful giddiness came over me, I was seized with a burning fever, and for several days I was seriously ill.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE NOTE.

I CONTINUED very ill for some days, and yet next to our retirement at Chantilly, I reckoned those days of illness among the happiest of my life.

Gontran never left me, and shewed me the tenderest attentions. My reflections were melancholy and sad ones, but yet there was a sweetness in their very melancholy. Sometimes I asked myself what would henceforth be the good that life could confer. I feared that I had exhausted all the felicity which I could expect, and

sincerely, and from no exaggerated feeling, I prayed to God to take me from this world, at that time death would have seemed almost a blessing to me.

My husband had become as affectionate and attentive as he used to be in by-gone days—he regretted the sufferings which he had caused me, was always at my side, and I was delivered from the presence of M. Lugarto.

My happiness was so great that I began to forget the sorrows which had occasioned my illness. I almost dreaded my restoration to health, lest I should then be deprived of Gontran's precious attentions, for as my health improved, he became less assiduous in his attendance.

In my selfish desire to keep him always with me, I longed ardently to experience a relapse. Unknown to my poor Blondeau, who, nevertheless watched over me with motherly anxiety, I committed some very imprudent acts, and the consequence was that I became once more rather seriously ill.

I cannot describe my joy at finding that I had succeeded. Gontran for a few days became again as attentive as at first. But the happiness of having him always with me, had such an influence over me that I soon acquired renewed life, and then my fears of losing him would return.

In the midst of these alternations I traced for myself a line of conduct from which I resolved never to deviate; and one which was in strict conformity with the last determination which I had taken. It would be false to assert that this determination was not a very painful one, but in every sacrifice one makes to love, there is a species of profound satisfaction which increases, as it were in proportion to the very greatness of that self-imposed sacrifice.

The day after I left my room for the first time, Blondeau brought me the list of the visitors who had come to make enquiries, and who had left their names at my door during my recent illness.

Among these were the Princess de Ksernika, M. de Rochegune, and M. Lugarto, Mademoiselle de Maran had also sent to enquire, but had not called in person.

She never went near a house in which there was any illness, for it was a mania of hers to believe all disorders contagious.

I was surprised at not seeing Madame de Richeville's name in the list, my prejudices against her had in some degree disappeared, not that I admitted in any sense the justice of her prejudices against Gontran, for complete blindness is one of love's symptoms, but her fascinating manners attracted me in spite of myself, and I no longer doubted that the interest which she felt in me was sincere.

"Has not Madame la Duchesse de Richeville sent to enquire after me?" I enquired of Blondeau.

"No Madame, but—

I saw by Blondeau's countenance that she had something to tell me about this list of visitors, and that she hesitated to do so.

"What is the matter with you? you seem embarrassed." I still allowed—though perhaps improperly—Blondeau, to continue upon the same familiar footing with me as I had done in the days of my childhood.

"The fact is, Madame, that I am afraid of making you uneasy."

"Is it anything about M. de Lancry?" I exclaimed.

"No, no Madame, it is an extraordinary circumstance which took place during your illness. I should not have mentioned it to you, had it not concerned—though indirectly, that good gentleman M. de Mortagne."

"Tell me quickly then!"

"Well then, Madame, on the evening of the day after you were taken ill, while you were asleep, I had gone down for a minute to the pantry, M. René, your valet de chambre had just told us that he was going to quit your service."

"True," I said to Blondeau, recollecting that I had seen in the morning a new servant whose countenance had struck me as not being unknown to me—do you know why René left us?"

"To return into Lorraine where he was born, at least so he said."

"And where did his successor come from?"

"He lived in an English family, he does his work very well, seems a very good sort of man, and very intelligent. But Madame, that has nothing to do with what I have got to tell you, as you will see. That evening then I was told that some one was asking for me at the gate of the Hôtel, and a note was put into my hand, in which were these words in the handwriting of M. de Mortagne, which I should recognize among a thousand.

*"My good Madame Blondeau, you may place every confidence in the bearer, who will tell you what I expect you to do. I have heard that Matilda is ill, and I particularly wish to hear every day how she is going on."*

*"Signed*

*"Mortagne."*

You may guess, Madame, that I did not hesitate for an instant. I went down to the gate, I saw a hackney coach, the door of which was half open, inside was a man whose features I could not distinguish in the darkness, and who said to me in a voice broken by emotion, and one which was unknown to me.

"Madame Blondeau, I have come from M. de Mortagne to enquire after the Viscountess de Lancry."

"She is very ill," I replied to the stranger. "The physicians fear a bad night."

"You will not be surprised at the mystery with which M. de Mortagne inquires through me, his friend, after the state of Madame

de Lancry's health," he added "when I tell you that for your mistress's own sake M. de Mortagne's name must not be pronounced in her house. You had not concealed from me, Madame, "continued Blondeau, the cruel scene which had taken place at the signature of your contract, and I thought it very natural that M. de Mortagne should take this roundabout way of enquiring after you, especially as he was then no longer at Paris."

"Where is he then?" I said to Blondeau.

"The stranger added that M. de Mortagne had been called away from Paris by some very important business concerning you, and to bring which to a prosperous issue, it would be necessary for him to envelope himself in the most profound mystery."

"What can that mean?"

"I know not, Madame." However, the stranger told me it would be impossible for him to enquire for me again at the gate of the Hôtel in that manner, without giving rise to remarks among your servants, which would be attended with ill effects, and in order to receive correct and frequent accounts of your health, he entreated me in the name of M. de Mortagne to put a kind of bulletin every day under a large stone by the garden rails, on the side nearest the *Champs Elysées*, which he would come to fetch every evening, as at night that spot was quite deserted, and that if I could sometimes come myself he should feel very grateful for M. de Mortagne's sake; as by that means he could obtain a still more detailed account, he added that M. de Mortagne had once thought of sending a servant to ask after your health, as it is customary to do, but that such imperfect information would not have satisfied his uneasiness—he told me also that he had thought of asking me to write to him by the post under a fictitious name, but that such a method would be the most dangerous of all."

"And why so dangerous?"

"I do not know, Madame, he did not explain himself any further, but he enjoined me expressly to tell you, once for all, that if you had to write to M. de Mortagne in any grave emergency, you were only to deliver your letter to Madame de Richeville in person, who would take care that he should receive it."

"It is very strange," I said to Blondeau, "and what did you do?"

"In compliance with M. de Mortagne's request, I wrote a bulletin of your health, and every evening under the pretence of taking a walk before coming to sit up with you, I put my letter under the rails, and the stranger came to take it. The day you were so very ill, I wrote a hasty line, and took it as usual. Next day I could not get out of your room till very late while you were getting a little sleep—you were better. I was delighted, I wrote two lines for M. de Mortagne, I ran to the rails, the night was very dark.

The stranger was doubtless waiting for me, for he said in a low voice,

"Madame Blondeau—is that you?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "For God's sake tell me how she is?" he exclaimed in a voice which seemed to me full of emotion. "Better, much better, tell M. de Mortagne," I replied, "this is the first time I have left my poor lady's room since yesterday, and I was bringing a little note!" I believe the stranger fell on his knees when he heard this good news, for the voice sank, as it were, quite low, and I heard these words pronounced, as if some one were praying.

"My God! my God! I thank thee, she lives, she will live!" "I must hasten back to Madame," I said to the stranger, "pray make M. de Mortagne's mind easy." "You need not fear, my good Madame Blondeau, he shall not be long without hearing this happy news." I was coming back to the house, when I fancied I heard in the direction of the railings, something like stifled cries, the noise of a struggle, and a hollow sound like the fall of some heavy substance."

"You terrify me! And what next?"

"I listened again, but heard nothing. Growing uneasy, I hurried back to the railings and listened, but still could hear nothing—nothing at all. I called out in a low voice, but no one answered. I thought I had been mistaken, and came back into the house."

"And the next day?" I asked Blondeau.

"Next evening just as the darkness was setting in, I carried a note to the usual place, and waited some time, but no one came, so I concluded M. de Mortagne's messenger had not been able to come so early. I withdrew, making up my mind to go and see early next morning whether the note had been taken away as usual."

"Well?"

"Well, madame, next morning I found the note still there. No one had been to fetch it. No, Madame. But what is still more unfortunate, and makes me fear some shocking event—"

"Oh tell me!" I exclaimed, seeing Blondeau's hesitation.

"Ah! madame," she continued, clasping her hands, "conceive my terror when I saw a large stain of blood close to the railings."

"Oh! horrible! and the note—the note?"

"I left it still there to see if any one would come and fetch it. But it was in vain. It was only yesterday that I took it away. It is, therefore, ten days to-day since this event occurred, for no one during the last ten days has been to fetch the note. It appears then, unfortunately, too true that it was M. de Mortagne's messenger who uttered the stifled cry which I heard."

"Alas! it seems but too probable, and are you quite sure, that you heard a cry—and something like the fall of a body?" I said to Blondeau.

"Yes, yes, madame, and those marks of blood are only too clear a proof that I was not mistaken."

"Listen to me, Blondeau, Monsieur de Mortagne lives opposite to this house, you must go to-night and ascertain if he is at Paris, if he is not I will go to-morrow to Madame de Richeville and inform her of it, for I am miserably uneasy, and as soon as Monsieur de Lan-cry comes in, I will tell him all this, that he may unite with me in an effort to clear up this sad mystery."

"Madame," interrupted Blondeau, "allow me to observe it might be imprudent to mention this to the Viscount. You are aware that he detests Monsieur de Mortagne, and the stranger told me that the latter was occupied about matters of serious importance to you. Alas! madame, you are happy at present," added the excellent woman, fixing upon me her eyes, bathed in tears, "but who can tell, perhaps a day may come, when you will be in need of Monsieur de Mortagne's protection, would it not be better not to mention all this to any body for fear that something should get abroad, attract people's attention to Monsieur de Mortagne, and so interfere with his projects, by dispelling the mystery which he thinks necessary to employ? Why should you tell this to the Viscount? After all, I acted without your knowledge, and if any one has acted wrong it is I. Besides what harm is there in giving an account of your health to one of your relations, and the only one who ever really loved you?"

In spite of my unwillingness to conceal anything from Gontran, I resolved to follow Blondeau's advice. My uneasiness at the influence which Monsieur Lugarto exercised over my husband was as painful as it had been before my illness; that man always inspired me with profound terror, and I thought that some day I and Gontran should, perhaps, be forced to seek the protection of Monsieur de Mortagne. I fancied that the latter's mysterious conduct was for the purpose of defeating or penetrating Monsieur Lugarto's pernicious designs. In that view of the case, the disappearance of Monsieur de Mortagne's emissary awakened my fears.

In the midst of these anxieties Monsieur de Rohegune was announced, I sent to request that he would wait for a few minutes. I gave some orders to Blondeau and I soon rejoined Monsieur de Rohegune, thanking heaven that by his means, perhaps, I should now be able to hear something of Monsieur de Mortagne—for I know the intimacy which subsisted between them.

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**CHAPTER XXXII.****THE INTERVIEW.**

M. DE ROCHEGUNE appeared to me much changed, and very pale, and looked more melancholy than usual.

"As soon, madame, as I heard you were well enough to receive visitors," he said to me, "I hastened to call, in order that I might discharge a commission with which I have been entrusted by one of my friends, who would be happy indeed to be reckoned one of yours also."

"To whom do you allude, sir?"

"To the Duchess de Richeville, who having been forced to leave Paris suddenly for Anjou, did not hear of your illness till after her arrival in that province, when she was apprised of it by me. She requested me to inform you how anxiously she has prayed for your restoration to health, so that it will be a great consolation to her to hear of your recovery."

"A consolation, monsieur? Has she met with any misfortune then?"

"I fear so, madame, she went away quite suddenly, having written me word that an unforeseen misfortune compelled her to leave Paris, and that she did not yet know the extent of the blow which had fallen upon her. Her last letter has not diminished my uncertainty, for she only wrote to me to request that I would become the interpreter of her feelings to you."

Involuntarily I recalled the kind of mysterious threat which M. Lugarto had uttered to Madame de Richeville, and a secret presentiment whispered to me that the misfortune which had withdrawn the Duchess from Paris, was in some way or other connected with that man.

"There is another person, sir, in whom I feel a most lively interest," I said to M. de Rochegune, "and who is also a friend of yours, M. de Mortagne."

"He has been absent from Paris for some days, madame, and at his departure he was still suffering from illness, for it will require the utmost care for a length of time to recruit his health which has already become so grievously impaired."

"Do you know where M. de Mortagne is, sir?"

"No, madame, and I regret it the more because I am on the point of leaving France—and for a very long time, perhaps. Before my departure I wished to do myself the honour, madame, of taking your orders in case you should have any commissions to give me for Naples, from which place I intend to embark."

"You are extremely kind, sir, but but I will not avail myself of your obliging offer."

M. de Rochegune was silent for a few moments and appeared embarrassed. Twice he looked up at me, and twice his glance fell beneath mine, at last, after some hesitation, he said to me with a look of almost solemn gravity.

"Madame, do you believe me to be a man of honour?"

I looked at M. de Rochegune with astonishment.

"You are the friend of M. de Mortagne," I replied, "and I was enabled, by a fortunate hazard, to become convinced that you were worthy of that friendship. In this very house, the scene of gratitude which I witnessed—"

"I implore you, madame," said M. de Rochegune, interrupting me, "to suffer me to forget that time, for the memories which are connected with it, are full of bitterness to me. I asked you, madame, if you thought me a man of honour, because I must become quite strengthened by your confidence, before I, who am a stranger to you, I, whom, perhaps, you will never see again, can presume to tell you what I have to say."

"I am certain, monsieur, that I may listen to you without fear."

"I will speak then, madame, and with sincerity. Let me, however, say one word—Believe me, the man in whom you are kind enough to recognize some nobility of disposition, is incapable of concealing a thought of evil. If you did not know, madame, several former events in my life, perhaps the step which I am now taking would seem to you insulting and incomprehensible. Allow me then to enter into a few details."

"I am listening to you, sir."

M. de Rochegune seemed to be reflecting before he continued. His gentle and melancholy countenance became pensive, and he proceeded in a voice which trembled slightly in spite of the visible efforts which he made to vanquish his emotion.

"The favorite project, madame, of M. de Mortagne and my father had been to obtain your hand for me—"

"Monsieur! why recur to these by-gone plans—I entreat you?"

"Forgive me, madame, for mentioning the past and its projects which are so uninteresting to you, but as I have had the honour to tell you, these details are indispensable. I had often before his unfortunate voyage to Italy, heard M. de Mortagne tell my father how unhappy a childhood yours had been, notwithstanding the rare and

excellent qualities with which you were endowed. The description of Mademoiselle de Maran's cruel behaviour towards you, aroused, more than once, the generous indignation of my father. I was then very young, but I shall never forget the interest I felt for your melancholy position. Till then I had always lived with my father, on one of his estates, and that, Madame, is to tell you that I had always under my eyes the example of the noblest virtues. When I heard M. de Mortagne relate some of Mademoiselle de Maran's actions, I discovered for the first time in my life, that perverse and wicked people existed in the world. Whenever I saw M. de Mortagne, I overwhelmed him with questions about you ; to me, madame, you were suffering, and resignation personified. I was for some length of time absent abroad, and often when I thought of my father, and of France, I gave a feeling of melancholy remembrance to the poor orphan girl who was abandoned to the wicked caprices of an implacable woman. If you knew, madame, the unconquerable hatred which I have always experienced towards a brutal abuse of power, if you knew how warmly I have ever espoused the cause of the feeble against the strong, you would feel no surprise at hearing me speak thus of the profound interest which I already entertained for you."

"And I am most grateful to you, sir, for it, believe me—"

"On my return I found M. de Mortagne at Paris, he came to inform my father and myself of the issue of that violent scene, at the conclusion of which your *conseil de famille*, madame, had left you under the guardianship of your aunt. It was then, for the first time, that my father spoke to me of those projects which were destined never to be realised. On my return from a campaign in Greece, which I had arranged with M. de Mortagne, the latter wished to try every expedient to open the eyes of your relations in order that you might be rescued from the power of Mademoiselle de Maran. You know madame, by what odious machinations, our courageous friend was detained for many years in the dungeons of Venice—We thought he was lost to us for ever. That generous man had inspired us with so lively an interest in your fate that my father believed he was fulfilling a pious duty in endeavouring to replace M. de Mortagne, as far as you were concerned."

"What do you mean, Monsieur ?"

"My father used every exertion to become intimate with Mademoiselle de Maran. In the noble delusion of his exalted soul, he fancied that by the sole influence of reason and virtue he could induce your aunt to change her behaviour towards you. He had several interviews with her, but always found her inflexible. I cannot tell you, madame, how deeply he regretted, and grieved for this. By turns he employed, towards that woman, the language of severity, menace, and supplication, but nothing could touch her."

"I had never heard of this interference Monsieur, and I am at no loss now to account for the aversion with which my aunt often spoke of your father."

"After another absence abroad I lost him—Madame," M. de Rochegune was silent for a minute, his head drooped, he wiped away a tear, and continued. "On his death-bed my father implored me, in the name of that friendship which existed between ourselves and M. de Mortagne, to watch perpetually over the orphan girl, who deserved for so many reasons the warm interest which our friend experienced in her fate. Alas! madame, I could but utter fruitless prayers for your happiness. I endeavoured in vain to obtain an introduction to your aunt, the name which I bore was a sufficient reason for my exclusion, and I was refused admittance to her house. You were then, I believe, madame, about sixteen years of age. Several times, excited by a kind of pious curiosity, which your situation inspired, I succeeded in meeting you, and your features bore an indelible expression of painful resignation, mingled with repressed melancholy, which it broke my heart to witness. You will forgive me—will you not? for the mysterious interest which I took in your existence. The sympathy which I experienced for you, was, as it were, a religious legacy which my father, which M. de Mortagne, our best friend had bequeathed to my heart. When unable to meet you, you were often the theme of conversation between Madame de Richeville and myself. The uneasy and jealous watchfulness of Mademoiselle de Maran frequently prevented some of our mutual friends from being admitted to converse with you. At the slightest enquiry as to your future fate, and the projects which she had formed on your account, Mademoiselle de Maran changed the conversation, or refused formally to make any reply. A year passed away in this manner. I received a letter from M. de Mortagne, who after incredible efforts had succeeded in bribing one of his gaolers, and in making his escape from Venice. Obligated to stop at Marseilles by the fatigues which he had undergone, he wrote to beg me to come to him immediately. I hastened to do so, I found him almost at the point of death, but with his thoughts engrossed by one sole subject—that of your future fate. I informed him that one of our friends, Madame de Richeville had in vain attempted to procure access to you. He asked me if you were in good health, if you were beautiful. I described you to him, Madame, and even then, when so near death, his eye lighted up with a ray of happiness and joy."

"Excellent friend!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, madame, you have not a more fervent or a more devoted one. I never left him, Madame de Richeville, braving appearances, perhaps, but following the first impulse of her friendship and unalterable gratitude, came to pass some time at Marseilles; she brought with her one of the first physicians from Paris; Monsieur

de Mortagne was saved ; as usual, his first care was for your fate—afterwards his thoughts reverted to that projected union, which had been the joy and hope of my father : that hope, which I had once believed might be realized—is sufficient to give me, I had almost said the right, to implore you always to make use of my entire and religious devotion to you. Monsieur de Mortagne, on his arrival in Paris wished to have an interview with you, whether Mademoiselle de Maran consented or not ; he wished to communicate to you his projects ; we are so apt to believe what we wish, madame, it appeared to me so enviable a fate to have it in my power to make amends to you for a childhood and youth of so much unhappiness, the partial friendship of Monsieur de Mortagne had painted the future to me in such glowing colors, that I arrived in Paris, almost partaking of the same hopes as those of my friend. Suddenly two overwhelming pieces of news dissipated this beautiful dream : your projected marriage with Monsieur de Lancry was arranged, and Monsieur de Mortagne, having attempted too soon, to travel, had again fallen dangerously ill at Lyons—they almost despaired of his life. I immediately went to him, the news I had to tell had such an effect on him that he was seized with a violent fever, which lasted about a month. Some pressing business obliged me to go to Paris before he did ; he arrived on the eve of your marriage. As for me, renouncing a hope that I had so long cherished I resolved to travel ; I put up my house for sale, and then I had the honor of seeing you in it, madame, with Monsieur de Lancry and Mademoiselle de Maran.”

“ Allow me to ask you one question, monsieur : do you know of the conduct of Madame de Richeville towards me before my marriage ?”

Monsieur de Rohegune regarded me with surprise, and answered with a tone of the greatest sincerity.

“ I do not know, madame, to what you allude.”

“ Will you then continue, sir ?” said I to Monsieur de Rohegune.

I believed, with agony, that without doubt he was about to speak of Gontran in the same terms as Madame de Richeville had done. Notwithstanding the conversation of Monsieur de Rohegune had been full of delicacy, consideration and respect, I should not have suffered the slightest attack against Monsieur de Lancry.

Monsieur de Rohegune continued.

“ You will perceive, madame, by this long preamble, that for ten years your fate has never ceased to occupy Monsieur de Mortagne, my father, or me, unknown to you, I confess, but at least an interest so lively and constant, may obtain for me the right to tell you an important truth, however cruel that truth may appear.

“ Sir, I do not know what you have to say to me—but if it has

reference to any accusation against Monsieur de Lancry, it is useless to prolong this conversation."

Monsieur de Rochegune looked at me with an astonishment that was mixed with sorrow.

"I see, Madame, that I have not the honor of being known by you; from the moment that you gave your hand to Monsieur de Lancry, that choice, so honorable for him, placed him at once, in my eyes, amongst those persons towards whom I should be happy to prove my devotion; one of the reasons which gives me courage to come in all confidence to you, Madame, is, that what I have to tell you concerns Monsieur de Lancry as much as yourself."

This simple and noble explanation relieved me from a weight upon my mind, which had been very great, but it also awoke my fears with regard to Gontran.

"What are you going to tell me, sir?" cried I, with emotion. After a moment's silence, he replied.

"You often see Monsieur Lugarto, madame?"

"Yes, sir, and I should almost say, against my will, were he not the friend of Monsieur de Lancry."

"Do you know, madame, *who* Monsieur de Lugarto is?"

"Alas, sir, I do."

"Do you know, madame, that Monsieur de Lugarto passes all his time now with Mademoiselle de Maran?"

"I did not know it, sir, on the contrary I have heard Mademoiselle de Maran treat him with the most unmerciful irony."

"Undoubtedly Mademoiselle de Maran treated him in that manner until the day she found out that you, madame, had not a more dangerous enemy than that man."

"That was sure to be so," said I smiling with bitterness. "My aunt had almost announced to me that fresh treason."

"But you are ignorant, madame, of all the blackness, the infamy of this new machination of Mademoiselle de Maran. You do not know what an infamous support she gives to the calumnies of Monsieur Lugarto."

"And what calumnies, sir? what such a man says; would it be believed? and besides what can he say?"

"Oh! nothing, madame, that he cannot justify—nothing either but what is true, which renders his infamous scandal more fatal—he says that Monsieur de Lancry is his intimate friend, and he proves it by shewing himself for ever with you both; he says that every morning he sends you flowers, with which you adorn yourself, and that is also true; he says that the fêtes he is going to give are given for you; he says that in the world you shew coldness towards him, but that is only a pretence to cheat your husband; he says, in short, that you love him, madame."

I looked at Monsieur de Rochegune in so stupified a manner that he thought I had not heard, and he repeated—

“Monsieur de Lugarto says that you love him.”

“I love that man ! why it is madness, sir, who would believe it ! who would allow such a thing to be possible ! without doubt I regret bitterly the intimacy that exists between him and my husband, I regret bitterly that I should be the object of attentions that I hate and despise, but never, oh God ! can I imagine that any such interpretation can be put upon them.”

Monsieur de Rochegune regarded me with an expression of pity and of grief.

“Alas ! madame,” replied he after rather a long silence, “it costs me much to convince you of such a disagreeable truth ; but your repose, and, shall I say it, the honor of Monsieur de Lancry makes it a duty in me to undeceive you.”

“Oh, sir, speak.”

“You are very young, madame ; you are proud of the purity and nobleness of your feelings ; you are proud of the love that you feel, and of that which you have inspired in the man of your choice ; you are proud, in short, of your happiness, because it is noble and legitimate ; you disdain those infamous calumnies ; who would believe them, you say ? listen, madam ; instead of supposing the world, as it is, greedy of scandal and falsehood : believing in evil, because vulgar and low minds have just intelligence enough to repeat it, to dwell upon such scandals, suppose the world to be an impartial spectator—what does it witness ? You, young, handsome, without experience, appearing already almost forgotten by your husband, while he is devoting himself to a woman well known in the world, and with a reputation that has often been compromised ; that is not all, the friend of your husband lives in continual intimacy with you ; he accompanies you everywhere ; his character is such that he is known to be incapable of forming a disinterested friendship. He publishes everywhere the favours (forced ones I doubt not), which he receives from you, these unfavourable appearances are strengthened by the jealousy which a woman placed in your position, madame, cannot fail to inspire. Mademoiselle de Maran pursuing still the same work of treachery and wickedness as distinguished her care of your infancy, is now playing another part. It was against her will, she says, that you married Monsieur de Lancry ; she dreaded his want of constancy, of which he gives now evident proofs, in his devotion to the Princess Ksernika. Mademoiselle de Maran says also that she has represented to Monsieur de Lancry, that he will drive you to some fatal plan of revenging yourself ; that your position is still more dangerous because you so often see Monsieur Lugarto ; and that, notwithstanding some prejudices she had against him, she cannot help confessing that he

is gifted with some charming qualities, and just fitted to seduce a woman—this is not all, Madame ; prepare yourself for the last blow, more cruel than those that have preceded it, because it does not attack yourself only. Mademoiselle de Maran gives another reason why she regrets your marriage with Monsieur de Lancry ; she affirms, that in consequence of the enormous debts contracted by your husband before your marriage, your fortune is now much embarrassed, and that—

“ You hesitate, sir,” I said to Monsieur de Rochemore, concealing my indignation, not against him, but against the odious conspiracy which seemed to unveil itself before my eyes. “ Continue, continue, I am prepared to hear all.”

“ And I to tell you all, madame, for happily I think I know the means of frustrating such unheard of wickedness.”

“ Continue, sir.”

“ Well, madame, your aunt has the wickedness to report that Monsieur de Lancry, finding his affairs in embarrassment, has had recourse to the assistance of Monsieur Lugarto, and that he is under such obligations to that man as oblige him to assent to his assiduities towards you.”

“ Oh ! my God ! my God !” I exclaimed, hiding my face in my hands.

“ You shudder, madame, it is indeed an abyss of shame and infamy, is it not ? you, so noble, and so pure, can hardly comprehend such a tissue of horrors. Yet, madame, believe a man who has never yet invented a falsehood, such are the reports which are circulated about you, Monsieur de Lancry, and Monsieur Lugarto ; and it is not a mere report without any apparent foundation, unfortunately it is a conviction founded on appearances the most unfortunate. Monsieur Lugarto has acted with most infernal cunning, Monsieur de Lancry and you, yourself, madame, have given the appearance of truth to these abominable calumnies.”

I was thunderstruck ; I understood, at last, all the instinctive dread and aversion, that Monsieur Lugarto had always inspired me with, I saw now the whole extent of the evil.

My suspicions of the nature of the obligations that Monsieur de Lancry had contracted with Monsieur Lugarto, appeared to me to be justified, on that point—without doubt Mademoiselle de Maran was right.

Though without any experience in the world, I knew enough of it to know that the most infamous reports would obtain credit, unfortunately a thousand little circumstances which appeared to me insignificant at the time, arose to my memory, as calculated to confirm the odious impression with regard to our relative position towards Monsieur Lugarto, and to influence the world in the judgment they would form of it.

For a moment I felt myself quite overwhelmed ; I buried my face in my hands and could not utter a word.

" You see now, madame, that it required all the imperious necessity of duty to induce me, in the absence of Monsieur de Mortagne, to enter on this subject with you, now—allow me to point out to you in what manner I can be useful to you ; under these circumstances, you must, without losing a moment, acquaint Monsieur de Lancry with what you have heard from me ; that he may not doubt the truth of it, tell him *all* our conversation ; as to the means of silencing these infamous reports, it is simply done ; I have not quite forgotten the lessons of Monsieur de Mortagne ; truth, however harsh or violent it may appear, is the one sure means beyond any other of crushing treachery and falsehood. After you have confided the whole to Monsieur de Lancry, neither you nor he should change your manner towards Monsieur Lugarto ; a few days hence you should give a party, and invite all your acquaintances, Monsieur Lugarto, Mademoiselle de Maran, and myself ; I will put off my departure till then, for I trust I can be of service to you ; on that evening, madame, aloud, and in the presence of all assembled, before that tribunal composed of people of the world, I will accuse Monsieur Lugarto and Mademoiselle de Maran of having vilely calumniated you, madame, and Monsieur de Lancry. Mademoiselle de Maran, notwithstanding her audacity, and Monsieur Lugarto, notwithstanding his impudence, will be overwhelmed by so solemn an accusation ; then you, madame, and Monsieur de Lancry, you will call upon that man and woman to repeat before you, before all assembled, the unworthy falsehoods they have spread about, to bring proofs of what they have asserted. Then, madame, believe me, however prejudiced the world may be, they will be forced to believe in the shameful infamy of those, who, confounded by your just indignation, will be unable to clear themselves."

" You, yes, you are right !" exclaimed I, re-animated by the noble language and generous advice of Monsieur de Rochegune. " Yes, it is an inspiration from heaven ! Blessings on you, sir, who have suggested it—the truth must shine triumphantly in that explanation. I shall shew neither pity or merey. Lie after lie, I will follow it up, till those infamous creatures will be obliged to confess their wickedness in the face of that very world, whom they have made their accomplices hitherto, but who will now be their judge !"

" Right ! madame, right ! I shall then take my departure, more easy and tranquillised for the fate of one towards whom I have vowed the most unalterable fidelity."

" Ah ! sir, you are the worthy and noble friend of Monsieur de Mortagne !" cried I, in offering my hand to Monsieur de Rochegune. " In the name of Monsieur de Lancry, in the name of our

everlasting gratitude, receive the assurance of a friendship no less lively than your own. By this courageous step you have saved us from great misfortunes. Never, oh ! never can we forget it."

Monsieur de Rochegune respectfully took the hand I offered him, cordially pressed it within his own, and said to me with emotion.

"By the sacred memory of my father, I swear to be to you as a brother—as the most devoted of your friends, will you agree to it ? do think me worthy of your friendship, madame ?"

"It is too flattering to us both to permit us to hesitate in agreeing to it with pride and joy," said I.

Some one knocked at the door.

Blondeau entered.

"What do you want ?" said I.

"Madame," replied she while looking attentively at Monsieur de Rochegune, "I have just received a letter which I was desired to deliver, without delay, to Monsieur de Rochegune."

She gave me a letter, I gave it to Monsieur de Rochegune—he exclaimed.

"It is from Monsieur de Mortagne ; I had left word at home, in case he arrived, that I was with you, madame—will you allow me to read this letter ? it may interest you."

I made a sign to Monsieur de Rochegune ; he opened the letter and read it.

"Madame," said Blondeau to me, pointing to Monsieur de Rochegune, "I know his voice—it is him."

"Who ?"

"It is the same person who came to enquire after you for Monsieur de Mortagne."

"What is it you say ?"

"As true as that there is a God in heaven, it is himself, madame, I am sure I am not mistaken ; it is his voice, I assure you."

While Blondeau was speaking to me, I examined the features of Monsieur de Rochegune ; all of a sudden an expression of profound anxiety took possession of them. I could not resist exclaiming—

"What is the matter, sir ? Monsieur de Mortagne—"

"I must rejoin him this moment, madame—we must quit Paris for some time, he is on the track of an abominable plot—he tells me this, without explaining himself further."

"And this plot, whom does it menace ?" cried I.

"Can you ask me, madame ? You—you."

"And Gontran—my husband ?"

"Monsieur de Mortagne recommends you not to quit him ; if he travels, travel with him, but above all, both for the sake of his safety and your own, never to be absent from him a single moment."

"My God! my God! and whom does he suspect? from whom have we so much to fear?"

"Need I tell you, madame? from Monsieur Lugarto. The immense wealth of that man gives him immense resource, he is as cunning as he is depraved. Monsieur de Mortagne, in order to counteract his projects, has been absent, or feigned to be absent, from Paris for some time past."

"But, sir, you leave me in cruel state of uneasiness."

"See the letter of Monsieur de Mortagne; he writes in haste, and gives me no particulars; during the absence of Madame de Richeville, he will not be able to send you any information, for it is only through her means that he is able to write to you; he fears that many of your household are bribed, and the least indiscretion on his part would render his designs abortive; he is therefore obliged to act in the shade and in silence. Adieu, madame, I quit you better satisfied. If Monsieur de Mortagne thinks that I can assist you in the explanation that you will bring about, I shall have the honor to come and tell you so, if not, persist in the plan I have marked down for you. It is the only one which strikes at the root of the evil, and it must confound the wicked ones. But, I have thought of something to make up for my absence, I will write to Monsieur de Lancry all that I have told you, authorising him to make use of my letter. Adieu, madame, Monsieur de Mortagne tells me every minute is of consequence—exercise hope and courage for you have bitter enemies."

"But we may count upon two very valuable friends said I to Monsieur de Rochegune. Adieu, sir, you have undertaken a noble task. May God support you through it."

Monsieur de Rochegune departed.

"It is him, madame, who was attacked and wounded. I am sure," said Blondeau. "Did you remark how pale he was, and the scar, which his hair did not entirely hide?"

"You are mistaken," said I.

"Oh! madame, his voice is too sweet for me not to have recognized it."

The *valet de chambre* opened the door and announced Monsieur le Comte de Lugarto.

Blondeau went out.

I found myself alone with that man.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE AVOWAL.

WHEN I saw M. Lugarto make his appearance I prepared to quit the room, but remembering the advice of M. de Rochegune, I restrained my indignation. M. Lugarto appeared anxious and embarrassed—an unusual circumstance with him, and he must have read upon my countenance some of the emotions under which I was labouring and which I repressed with difficulty.

I sat down near one of the windows, and looked out into the garden, waiting for M. Lugarto to speak. After a considerable silence he sat down at my side, and hastily said to me.

"You have been very ill, I have felt extreme uneasiness on your account, and you have no idea how much I suffered."

"I am perfectly aware, monsieur, of all the interest which you feel in me," I replied with a bitter smile.

"You still hate me then?"

"Monsieur."

"God bless my soul, why deny it? And yet what have I done to you?"

"It is not for me to answer such questions, sir."

"But, after all, it is usual to tell people what subjects of complaint one may have against them. Since your arrival in Paris I have always endeavoured to make myself agreeable to you."

"You gave yourself a useless trouble, sir."

"Oh! it was very easy to find out that! The sole return you made to all my attentions was contempt."

"That might have taught you, sir, that those attentions were disagreeable to me."

"But, once more, why is it so? you will not answer me. Were those attentions then which every woman receives, if not with complaisance at least with gratitude, an insult to you?"

I raised my eyes, as if to call heaven as a witness to this man's execrable duplicity. He moved impatiently in his seat, and then continued, endeavouring to give an affectionate and insinuating accent to the natural harshness of his voice.

"Come, come, do not be so ill-natured, let us talk like good friends, for I am really your friend though you have done every-

thing hitherto to irritate me against you. But, I do not know how it is, you have bewitched me. I, who never forget those who wish me ill, and who know how to prove to them that I do not forget, find it impossible to keep any resentment against you, I forgive you everything. The influence you possess over me is incredible! At first I could not understand that influence at all, then by degrees I discovered—but you will be angry again—Really I, who am no schoolboy, I, who am so well skilled in woman, hesitate, for the first time in my life, to tell you—for you look so cold, so haughty—that—that's right, you are worse than ever now; if you look at me in that way, you are not taking the right method to make me speak out."

I gave M. Lugarto a glance of such proud and withering scorn, that, in spite of his audacity, he hesitated for a moment, but he soon continued, as if ashamed of having allowed himself to be disconcerted.

"After all, I am a fool, I shall tell you nothing that you have not guessed long ago, women are not blind, they are the first to perceive, the feelings which they inspire. Well then, I love you, yes—love you passionately."

M. Lugarto uttered the last words in a voice which was low and trembling with emotion. Thanks to M. de Rochegune's warning, I was prepared for this insolent confession, and not a muscle of my face moved. M. Lugarto doubtless expected an explosion of indignation on my part, and he appeared quite surprised at my self-possession, and the silence which I maintained.

"Yes, I love you to distraction," he continued, "I who never hitherto knew ought of love but a few trifling and ephemeral caprices, I now feel when with you, an imperious longing, to fix myself, and for ever. If you choose, we might manage matters admirably. Now that I am admitted to an intimacy with you, we might lead a most delightful existence. But you do not answer! have I offended you?"

"Go on, sir, pray go on."

"How strangely you address me! Perhaps you think me incapable of an eternal fidelity to you? You are wrong, believe me, I have engaged—perhaps in too great an excess—in all the pleasures of life, and I should be delighted were it in my power to repose my weariness in some gentle, some calm affection, my disposition—which I fairly confess, is often a detestable one—would become much improved—indeed it would. I am sure that if you would take the trouble, you might make me much better than I am. Come then—do try—what harm can it do you? I will love you so much! Oh! you do not know what it is to be loved by a man who despises all other men! You shall do anything you like with me, and every body will say: look at Madame de Tancrède's influence, she has con-

trived to fix, to soften, and to mould to her own wishes that man who was once the most ungovernable being in the world ! !”

If I had not felt by the violent emotions of my heart, that a fatal crisis in my life was imminent, and that a fearful danger was darkly gathered round myself and Gontran, this man's incredible self-sufficiency, and his cynical vanity which was almost as odious as it was ridiculous, would have made me smile with pity, but I was labouring under the influence of cruel presentiments.

M. Lugarto terrified me, I fancied that in spite of his coarse vulgarity he would not have dared thus to have spoken to me, had he not felt he could do it with impunity—therefore, I said to him clasping my hands together with terror.

“What has happened, sir ? that you dare to speak to me in that strain ?”

“My language is very simple, notwithstanding—my God—reassure yourself—I am not exigent—I ask nothing more than to be allowed to entertain hope for the *future* and that you will shew a little confidence in me for the present ; allow me to love you, take no care for the rest ; only be true enough to me to promise not to fight against the inclination which might speak to your heart in my favour. Come now, confess you think me conceited to talk to you in this way. I would lay a wager that you are offended. Well, you are wrong—I speak the language of sincere love. The man who really loves, always feels certain of making his passion shared, sooner or later. How wayward you are ! Do smile away that savage look. After all, what is it I ask of you ? merely to suffer yourself to be happy—you shall see—you shall see. Do at least answer me, Matilda.”

As he thus addressed me, M. Lugarto approached and attempted to take my hand. While listening to this villanous language, I almost fancied myself to be dreaming, I was well aware of this man's impudence, and I was well nigh tempted to ask myself whether I had not unknowingly done something to deserve such humiliation. I thought myself fatally punished for not having sufficiently shewn to M. Lugarto the aversion with which he had inspired me. When he attempted to take my hand I became exasperated with terror, shame, and anger, and hastily rising, I exclaimed.

“Leave the room, sir ! leave the room, this instant. Disgust and contempt sometimes rise to such a pitch that the soul revolts, notwithstanding the efforts which are made to restrain it. I tell you to leave the room, sir !”

“Are you then without pity—without heart ?” exclaimed M. Lugarto. “Is love to you an insult ? for I *do* love you, I swear that I love you. If hitherto I have offended and annoyed you, I implore you to forgive me, it has been the result of my bad education. And then I have not been accustomed to meet often with women like

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yourself—and that has spoilt me. My manners are bad, I confess it, but with one word, one word of the least affection, you might have changed me, it would have been so sweet to me, to obey *you*. And then I did not know what to think. When I saw you so indifferent to my attentions, I thought that you did not understand what those attentions signified, I knew not what to imagine in order to make you understand that it was love : sometimes I was tempted to depart, but the charm which everything about you possesses restrained me in spite of myself. Come then, if you will not feel a little interest in me, at least have a little compassion, command me to do anything, tell me to go away, and I shall have the strength to do it, but let me know at least that some day, perhaps, I shall be recompensed for so cruel a sacrifice. Answer me—in pity answer me—nothing—nothing—not one word—still that look of implacable hatred and contempt! Ah! I am very miserable! And yet people envy me—*me!*” exclaimed M. Lugarto.

His cheeks were livid, the man wept, or pretended to do so, and he hid his face in his hands.

If I had not been previously warned by M. de Rochegune of the odious reports which this man had circulated, I might, perhaps, have believed in his apparent sorrow, though without being touched by it in the slightest degree. As it was, I perceived in it only an insulting hypocrisy : and my sole feeling for the man was one of horror. I approached the door, in order to quit the room, M. Lugarto perceived this movement and placed himself before the door.

I was frightened, and hastened back towards the chimney-piece for the purpose of ringing the bell.

“ You wish then to drive me to despair !” he exclaimed in a voice of emotion, and clasping his hands with an imploring air.

“ Oh ! tell me, tell me only, that you will allow me to attempt to win your favor, that you will permit me to endeavour to vanquish the aversion you feel towards me, tell me that at least—nothing else !”

And he fell at my feet.

I hastily rang the bell.

“ Oh ! that’s the case, is it ?” he exclaimed, turning pale with rage. “ Nothing then is of any avail with you, prayers, tenderness, or humility. Well then, I will employ other methods. On your knees, proud woman, do you hear ? on your knees you shall implore me to have pity on you.”

There was so much confidence, and such a deadly maliciousness in the man’s accent, that I shuddered with terror.

A *valet de chambre* now made his appearance.

“ Tell my servants to go away,” said M. Lugarto with the greatest coolness, and before I could say a word. Nothing could apparently

be more simple than this order. The servant left the room. I was so stupified with astonishment that I could not stop him. M. Lugarto who had repressed his rage for a minute, now gave way to all his fury. He became actually hideous, his eyes were blood-shot, his whole body trembled convulsively, and his colourless lips were contracted with a kind of nervous twitching. I could not move a step : and I awaited with anxiety for some terrible revelation.

"Ah ! you choose to struggle with me !" he exclaimed. "You don't know my power then ?" And yet you saw me give check-mate to that insolent Princess, with a single word ? As for that beautiful Duchess you little know the tears of blood which her impertinence to me is forcing her to shed now. You do not know that if I choose—do you hear ? if I choose I should only have to say one word—one single word, to make you faint away with terror. Ah ! you think that when a man like me wishes for anything, he wishes in vain ! ah ! you think I do not know how to revenge myself on those who outrage me ! ah ! you think that while you were heaping insults and contempt upon me, I was not giving you back contempt for contempt, insult for insult. A pretty fool I should be indeed ! But I would have you know that, thanks to me and your aunt whom I have managed to bring over to my side, you are already lost in the opinion of the world. Whatever you may do hereafter, an incurable wound has been inflicted upon your reputation. The world judges, condemns, and strikes for a thousand times less than that. But I would have you know that, in order to complete and perfect my plausible calumnies, the Princess, by my command, has made advances to your husband, and that he, also by my commands, is unfaithful to you : this is a fact well known to all, and the world says that you avenge yourself on your husband, by intriguing with me. Now I defy you to put an end to these reports, and these appearances. Whether you wish it or not, I shall be there, always close to you. I frighten you, I horrify you, so much the better—you will only have one means of escaping from my persecution. I am tired of easy conquests, and I would rather triumph, as they call it, by terror than by love. I fancy I can see you now, imploring—despairing—terrified—your beautiful eyes bathed in tears—so much the better—you will be more enchanting than ever."

As he uttered these execrable words, the man's glassy eyes seemed to gleam with a savage ferocity. For some minutes I had listened to him mechanically as if I were the sport of some frightful nightmare, when suddenly I heard a noise in my husband's apartment. It was his step, he was about to enter the drawing-room. I clasped my hands and exclaimed—"Thank thee, oh God ! he is coming."

M. Lugarto looked at me with astonishment. The door opened and M. de Lancry appeared.

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**CHAPTER XXXII.****THE DEFIANCE.**

At the sight of Gontran, my first impulse was to run to him and exclaim—

“Save me ! save me !”

“The disorder of my looks struck Gontran ; he exclaimed fixing a look on Monsieur Lugarto.”

“Matilda, what is the matter ? in the name of God what has happened ?”

Monsieur Lugarto began to laugh immoderately, and said to Monsieur de Lancry :

“Why my dear sir, do you know your wife is quite incomprehensible, she has actually taken up seriously nothing but a foolish joke.”

“You are a villain,—cried I,—I will keep no terms with you—in exposing your conduct to my husband, I do not endanger his life ; you would not dare to fight him ; he would not degrade himself by fighting with you.”

“You hear how she treats me, said Monsieur Lugarto to Monsieur de Lancry ; acknowledge that I am very good humoured.”

“A truce to joking, sir ! cried Gontran ; I see by the agitation, and the paleness of Madame de Lancry, that she is greatly hurt ; whatever may be my friendship for you, I will never permit you to forget for a moment the respect which you owe to my wife.”

“You take it in that way, my good fellow, do you ? that alters the case,” said M. Lugarto, “we will not talk about it any more, let us forget all this nonsense, and think of something else. What are you going to do this evening ?”

“You hear him !” I exclaimed, “this man tells you to forget what he calls nonsense ! He will ask you to give him your hand and then he will betray you again. No—no—my noble, my generous Gontran, whatever pain the discovery may inflict upon your kind and confiding heart, I will tell you everything ; this man whom you believe to be your friend must be unmasked, you must here in his presence, learn all the scandalous reports which he is circulating about myself and you, you must know that in this very room, just now he declared his infamous love to me, not merely in the guise of unmeaning

gallantry—he is a liar—no—no—he first spoke of his love in a tone of entreaty, with tears in his eyes, with soft and hypocritical words.”

“Sir!” exclaimed Gontran, turning crimson with rage, and casting a glance of fury upon M. Lugarto.

“Pray hear her to the end, my good fellow, I repeat again, she has no cause for all this fine indignation, and that she is mistaking, a stupid joke for a serious insult.”

“And then,” I continued, “when he saw the contempt, the disgust, which his words inspired in me, he had recourse to threats of vengeance, and to the most horrible revelations. The world—he said—believes you to be faithless to me, Gontran, the world—he added—believes that I avenge myself for your desertion, by an intrigue with that man. Did you not say this, sir! did you not say this?”

M. Lugarto smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“Monsieur Lugarto, take care!” said Gontran in a hollow voice—“human patience has its limits, and for a long time—oh! a very long time; I have been patient, do you hear?”

M. Lugarto dropped his eyes to the ground and made no reply. Proud of his confusion and hoping to rid myself for ever of him, after this cruel scene I continued.

“But this is not all; he has allied himself to our most mortal enemy, Mademoiselle de Maran, in order to proclaim everywhere that you, you, my noble Gontran, are obliged to endure his presence even while you execrate it—that the attentions he pays to me are tolerated by you. And do you know why? because our fortune is compromised by your debts, and that you have been obliged to have recourse to this man’s money.”

For an instant I was terrified at the expression of rage which animated Gontran’s features.

He rose, seized M. Lugarto by the arm and said to him in a voice of thunder.

“Do you hear what my wife says, sir? do you hear?”

“At last, oh God! we shall be delivered from that fiend!” I exclaimed clasping my hands.

M. Lugarto had remained seated.

When Gontran approached him, he did not make the slightest movement, but coolly releasing himself from M. de Lancry’s grasp, he fixed his eyes upon him and said to him with an ironical calmness at which I was thoroughly astonished.

“Why, my good fellow, you are decidedly mad!”

“I tell you, sir, that the reports which you circulated are infamous—and that I will not suffer.”

“You will not suffer!” slowly re-iterated M. Lugarto, with a sarcastic laugh. “Ha! ha! ha! upon my word he is delightful with his “will not suffer.” Come, *Monsieur le Vicomte de Lancry*, you

don't mean to pretend that you have the presumption to menace me?"

"Yes—yes—whatever may happen, for once at least I——."

"*Whatever* may happen, Viscount?" exclaimed M. Lugarto in a shrill voice, interrupting my husband, "*whatever* may happen? pray be kind enough to say that again."

Gontran was in a state of inexpressible anguish, his handsome countenance which was painfully contracted, expressed hatred, rage, and despair, but you would have said that some mysterious influence prevented the explosion of those violent feelings.

At last they burst forth, M. de Lancry exclaimed, stamping violently,

"Well then! yes, yes, whatever may happen, since you drive me to extremities I will insult you, do you hear? I will insult you before the world; we shall fight, and I will kill you, or you shall kill me, the earth can no longer bear both of us, this existence is insupportable to me. If it were not for the fear of causing you an infernal joy, I should have already delivered myself from a life which is odious to me."

There was such profound despair in these words of Gontran, and they menaced me with another new and so formidable calamity, that I felt my strength give way.

"You will not insult me, and I will not fight you," coolly replied M. Lugarto. "In the first place, as madame justly observed, I should be afraid to do so, and then *you* would not condescend. But let us return to your *whatever may happen*. Is this a defiance—eh, Viscount? Do you wish me to say, this very instant, before madame——"

"Stop, oh! stop! not another word," exclaimed Gontran, with an effort—"in pity—not a word!"

He threw himself into an arm chair, covered his eyes with his hand, and exclaimed in a voice broken with emotion.

"Oh! my God! oh! my God!"

I was stupified with astonishment.

"Come, come, one has a deal of trouble in convincing you, my dear and intimate friend, that I am not so black a devil as I am painted," continued M. Lugarto. "What do I ask? merely to live in peace with you and your wife, to realize the *equilateral triangle* of the Italians—that is to say, of course, all in an honourable way—for you are a naughty, jealous man, a regular Othello. Let's see now, what do you grumble at? Taking it for granted that I *am* paying court to your wife, what does that signify to you? She is virtuous, she adores you, and execrates me; these are three solid reasons for your being easy on that score; it is in fact a species of Cerberus with three heads, which sufficiently defends your conjugal felicity. 'But,' you will tell me, 'the world talks and thinks that you are

on the best possible terms with my wife.' God bless my soul, let the world talk as much as it likes, an't you sure of your wife's fidelity? Come, Viscount, be philosophical, and do not attach any importance to foolish words. 'But,' you will say again, 'these rumours, false as they are, are still annoying.' Possibly they may be so, but you know that of two evils you must choose the least, and since the world's chatterings frighten you, just consider, my good fellow, what that same world would do, if I took it into *my* head to prate about certain circumstances—if I related how in London—"

"For God's sake, sir!" exclaimed Gontran with an imploring air.

M. Lugarto looked at me with an ironical smile.

"There, you see, this fine bully has become as supple as a glove; you, who are wisdom personified, do advice him to be reasonable. Viscount de Lancry you are in my power, you have no means of escape except by assassinating me, or committing suicide yourself. Now I know you are too well-bred a man to have recourse to such extreme methods. This point then being established, let us proceed. Come, my good fellow, let us forget your wife's foolish fancies, let us all three live together in a delightful intimacy as we have hitherto done, let the world prate if it likes, and let us enjoy life, which is so brief. However, as I am not to be insulted with impunity, and as I am determined to be avenged for this charming Matilda's contempt, I will punish her, and I condemn her to come and dine with you to-day at my house, in order to celebrate her convalescence. There will only be a small party—the Princess Ksernika, and three or four men and women friends of mine. I am not joking, my good fellow, you hear what I say—I *choose it*. Madame de Lancry will make a fuss, but I leave you the task of persuading my fair enemy, you will be at no loss, I am certain, for some excellent reasons to give her—"

I gazed at Gontran in stupefaction, he did not utter a word, his eyes were fixed, and his head drooped down upon his breast. M. Lugarto got up and said,

"Is not all this funny enough, my good friends? Who would suppose that at this minute, in one of the prettiest hôtels of the faubourg Saint-Honoré, on such a fine spring day as this is, one of those incredible scenes is taking place which would make the fortune of a romance writer? And yet it is a fact. Life in this world is, after all, a much less prosaic affair than people are apt to fancy. Well then, good bye for the present—we dine at seven. You shall try my new cook, he comes from Prince Talleyrand's and I hear wonders of him. Ah! while I think of it, you shall send back your carriage after dinner, and we will all go to Tivoli, there is to be a charming fête there, and they say the Duchess

of Berry will be present. I have set my heart upon being seen there with you, your wife, and your adorable Princess, you naughty, faithless swain you. So then it is all settled, I will bring you back to your house, and before we return we will go and have some ices at Tertoni's—you see I am quite bent upon continuing to compromise Matilda, and I flatter myself I make choice of a right good place of exhibition for that purpose. Now then my good fellow, you have heard what I have said—eh?"

"I have, sir," said Gontran in a low voice.

"I depend then upon you and my fair enemy. But just take the trouble of answering me, will you? I have told you that I choose it, and that ought to be sufficient for you, I should think."

"Madame de Lancry and myself will dine with you, sir," replied Gontran with a desperate effort.

M. Lugarto left the room with a glance of infernal triumph at me.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### EXPLANATIONS.

After the departure of M. Lugarto, neither myself or Gontran had courage to utter a single word, and I became immersed in the most desponding reflections. It was too true then, a mysterious, a terrible secret had placed M. de Lancry in the power of M. Lugarto. For the first time my husband had talked of destroying himself, this dreadful thought had never occurred to my mind, and I shuddered when I reflected upon Gontran's resolution. My heart had been painfully wounded when he exclaimed, addressing himself to M. Lugarto. *Where it not for the fear of causing you an infernal joy, I should have already put an end to my existence.* Alas! he forgot then that I should survive him! I then bitterly reproached myself for holding so little place in Gontran's existence, I reproached myself for having—if the expression may be allowed—*loved so badly.* Nor was this any vain humility of heart, but a conscientious feeling. Doubtless he had always found me, devoted, attentive, submissive, and passionately affectionate, but I must have made a bad use of those noble sentiments, since he could die without regretting me. From that instant I acquired that bitter conviction which sprang from the most fervent love, and from a profound distrust of myself—it is *always one's own fault when one is not loved.* I clung with all my strength to this conviction, paradoxical as it certainly was, and I

exerted all the resources of my mind, and all the power of my heart to invest it with an undeniable authority.

This conviction allowed me to accuse myself, and to forgive Gontran. Women who have loved with that sublime blindness, that magnificent abnegation of *self*, which constitutes passion, will understand the happiness with which one seizes the slightest opportunity of excusing the cruelty of the beloved one, even when his acquittal involves the sacrifice of oneself. Now that years and misfortunes have matured my judgment, it seems to me that this obstinate indulgence must also, perhaps, be attributed to the imperious necessity which we feel of justifying our choice in our own eyes, even at the cost of our most cherished hopes. Once influenced by this self-distrust, I reproached myself besides, for not having known how to inspire Gontran with sufficient tenderness to make him tell me the melancholy secret of which M. Lugarto made so fatal an abuse.

When I saw Gontran's wretchedness I almost accused myself of a crime in having shewn at first so much contempt towards M. Lugarto, and in not having better known how to dissemble my aversion. Then instead of becoming exasperated against us, perhaps that man might have been inoffensive. I was happy, and yet terrified at this last reflection. So formidable was the power of my love! I whose pride was so great, especially since I had belonged to Gontran, I now was almost tempted to regret, that I had behaved with dignity towards the most contemptible, the most wicked of men.

I feel some surprise now at the prolonged silence which continued between myself and Gontran after this scene, but M. Lugarto's words had so clearly established his dreadful power over Gontran, that we were compelled to remain for some time as it were stunned by this deadly blow.

M. de Lancry kept his face hidden between his two hands.

I approached him, trembling as I did so—"My love"—I began.

"What more would you have?" he hastily exclaimed in an angry tone of voice. And lifting up his face which was as dark as night in its expression; he gave me a look which made me turn pale.

"This is what your caustic behaviour, your absurd prudery have brought us to? a formal explanation! You must surely be satisfied now! I hope that my position with regard to Lugarto, is sufficiently clear and well defined."

"What do you mean, Gontran? was I to listen then without indignation to that man's horrible avowals? But my honour, your own."

"Oh! madame, who wants you to compromise your honour or mine? There is a wide abyss between actual guilt, and harmless coquetry. If you had possessed a particle of intelligence you would have guessed from the first words in which I mentioned Lugarto to

you, that he was a man to be treated considerably. But no, notwithstanding my most express recommendations you have twenty times over exerted yourself to irritate him. *Blasé*, and vicious as he is he takes a detestable delight in contradiction and resistance. A few affectionate common places from you would have rid us of him at once. But you have played too sharp a game with him, and now," added M. de Lancry with rage, "now his patience is exhausted. In spite of myself I allowed some harsh expressions towards him, to escape me. I know now that he is paying his court to you, and I must be coward enough, not only not to strike him publicly, but even to appear to night, to-morrow, day after day in society with you and him. This is what you have done madame."

"I ! I !"

"Yes, yes, you, and you only ! Since you were as sure of yourself, as I am of you, you should, without accepting this attentions, at least not have repulsed them with such brutality. You should have gracefully and kindly told him that such assiduities were compromising to you, and that if he wished to please you, he must commence by obeying you in that point ; had you done this he would have complied, for you would not thus have deprived him of all hope, or exasperated him against us. But was it for me, pray, to enter into such details ? Was it for me to tell you the part you were to play under these circumstances ? Was it not your duty to spare me a task so humiliating and ridiculous ? If you loved me really for myself I should not have had to tell you all this. "A virtuous woman does not merely show she is such by parading her virtue," he added with a bitter smile, "but she must take care also not to place her husband in a position from which he can only escape by dishonour or a crime. Do your hear, madame ?"

"Good God ! Gontran !"

"You talked of pecuniary obligations. I would give my existence to have no others towards him ; know, unhappy woman, that he holds in his hands more than my existence—do you hear ? more than my existence ? Now do you understand."

"Oh God ! I do understand ! Forgive me, Gontran, be kind, be just now that I acknowledge myself that I was wrong. You know that before my illness I had formed a resolution of loving you for yourself, and that resolution, dearest, I will always keep. Our situation is a horrid one—I do not ask you what this secret may be, no—but yet, what can we do ?"

"Dine with him this evening, first of all, and then go to that fête."

"Be it so, we will go—we will go—Oh ! you shall see, I will be quite courageous. I will talk to this man without betraying my aversion to him. If necessary I will even smile upon him. The world may interpret my conduct as it likes, it matters little to me so that

I have no cause to blush in the eyes of God or in yours. I have more resolution, Gontran, than you suppose. Come, let us look attentively at our situation. This man can destroy you, I abhor him as much as I love you, Gontran, yet I shall be able, I promise it you, to conceal the horror with which he inspires me—but still if he persists, if some day he says to me—to *me*, for that man dares to do anything—‘I will reveal the secret which has power to destroy your husband, unless you will love me.’

Gontran reddened with indignation, and exclaimed—

“I will kill him and myself afterwards!”

“That man was right then, dearest, a crime or a suicide—well, let it be so then, at all events you shall not die alone. This then is the worst aspect of the circumstances in which we are placed. Now listen to me. This morning M. de Rochegune came to take leave of me, and while here, he received a letter from M. de Mortagne. Do not look so angry, Gontran, our situation is a melancholy one, and M. de Mortagne is, perhaps, our only friend. He knows, I am ignorant how, that M. Lugarto has formed some sinister designs against you and myself. He says he has left Paris in order to defeat those designs, and he advises me, above all, never to leave you, should you be compelled to travel. Doubtless all this is very vague, but at all events it is consolatory to reflect that we have friends who are watching over us.”

“And M. de Mortagne must do a great deal to make me forget his cowardly insults!” exclaimed Gontran.

“Believe me, dearest, he will willingly do all that is necessary for that.”

“But, after all, he was not mistaken, he warned you that I should make you very unhappy,” said Gontran with repressed indignation, “and you must acknowledge the justice of his prophecy.”

“Dearest,” I said, attempting to smile. “I certainly like M. de Mortagne very much, but I am compelled to confess that in this instance he is wrong, it is not you, but that implacable man, who makes me so unhappy. While you were free did you not diffuse around me every possible felicity? Before my marriage, was I not indebted to you for delightful days radiant with hope and love?”

“And those hopes have been fearfully deceived, have they not?”

“Gontran, you well know that is not the case. Did not my happiness at Chantilly attain the limits of the ideal? Who tore us from that Eden? that odious man! Was not his arrival the signal of all our sorrows? Do I not know now that in paying attentions to that woman of whom I was so jealous, you were only obeying still the influence of that man? Was it not necessary for his frightful projects that you should appear to be unfaithful to me? Once more, Gontran, I do not accuse you.”

"You are still, always, and in spite of everything a noble and excellent creature," said Gontran looking at me with emotion. "Ah! cursed be the day when I listened to the advice of my uncle and Mademoiselle de Maran. What a life have I entailed upon you, unhappy girl! Oh! it is frightful, and sometimes I have a horror of myself."

And with these words, Gontran, rushed out of the room.

Misfortune sometimes confers great decision of character. I resolved to follow Gontran's directions and to treat M. Lugarto with affability. Now that I am no longer under the charm of my love for M. Lancry, nor under the impression of my terror at his *friend*, I can scarcely conceive how I could resign myself to such a humiliating concession, after the odious scene which had taken place that morning.

But then I had no hesitation, the great object was to gain time, M. de Mortagne was acting also on his side, and perhaps he had hopes of discovering a way to rescue Gontran from M. Lugarto's influence.

We set off for the dinner and fête. It was magnificent weather, and I recollect a trifling but whimsical circumstance which occurred on the way. At the corner of the avenue de Marigny our carriage was compelled to stop for some minutes. A poor man, hideously ugly and deformed, came up and began to beg. Gontran, I believe, did not hear him, and the beggar cast an angry look at us, saying with a menacing gesture, as our carriage drove on, 'oh these rich, how proud they are! and well they may be, they are so happy!'

By a spontaneous and sympathetic movement Gontran and I looked at each other, as though to protest against this accusation of happiness.

And yet, alas! that poor man's mistake was an excusable one, he saw a young couple in a splendid carriage, environed with that luxury which the vulgar take for happiness, and which often conceals so many sorrows, so many incurable wounds. Could that poor man guess the misery which distracted our bosoms? And then that sumptuous fête to which we were on our way, with a hidden and vague terror, as though we were going to the rack! What melancholy lessons are taught by these contrasts between the appearance and the reality.

We arrived at M. Lugarto's.

My discouragement and melancholy had given way to a kind of feverish and factitious animation. M. Lugarto received us with a smile upon his lips, he was triumphing in the pride of his execrable wickedness.

His house, which I had never seen, was encumbered with the most magnificent articles, but crowded together and accumulated without the slightest taste. In the midst of this chaos of ad-

mirable productions, certain incredible littlenesses denoted the instincts of a sordid avarice. The vast and opulent mansion, in spite of its proportions, was completely destitute of elegance, nobleness and grandeur.

We found already assembled the persons whom M. Lugarto had announced to us, I looked now and then at Gontran in order to acquire fresh courage for my task, and M. Lugarto seemed struck by my altered manners towards him.

All that I could do was to display towards him a politeness almost friendly, at which he appeared more surprised than touched, and he watched me narrowly as if he mistrusted appearances, his attentions to me, however, were most obsequious. Gontran sat next to the Princess de Ksernika, gloomy and absorbed in reflections, he scarcely replied to that woman's coquettish advances. M. Lugarto whispered to me, as we left the table, that he was the happiest of men now that I seemed inclined to renounce my unjust prejudices against him, and added that he bitterly regretted the rage he had given way to that morning, but that I must excuse it in consideration of the impetuosity of a love which he could not master.

"Alas!" I thought while listening to him, "who once would have told me that, three months after my marriage, after that union which to me was one so adorably excellent and holy, I should be compelled to listen to such words as those, without being able to give vent to my shame, my disgust, my indignation? Oh profanation! oh sacrilege! a love which my dreams had pictured so noble, elevated, and pure?"

After dinner, in compliance with M. Lugarto's desire, he, the Princess, Gontran, and myself set off for Tivoli in our host's carriage. My tortures continued.

M. Lugarto gave me his arm, the Princess leant upon my husband's, there were a great many people at this fête, and almost all the persons about the court, whom their functions retained at Paris, were present.

I had been ill for some time, and I had not appeared in public for several weeks, so that I was deeply surprised at a certain vague change which had taken place in the manner of my own and M. de Lancry's reception. The men returned his bow with a cold and distant air, and some ladies whom he spoke to scarcely answered him at all. M. Lugarto, on the contrary, was received as usual, and his countenance was radiant with satisfaction. I fancied that I saw the men look at him with envy, while several ladies pointed to me in a contemptuous manner.

I remembered M. de Rohegune's revelations, and shuddered when I reflected on the ignominious rumours, of which myself and Gontran were, perhaps at that very moment, the objects, so overwhelming were the appearances against us.

I felt my strength giving way, and said imploringly to M. Lugarto—

“Our fate is in your hands, sir, have pity upon us, and let us leave this garden.”

“The Duchess de Berry is approaching, madame, and it is indispensable that Gontran and you should go and pay your respects to her,” replied M. Lugarto.

In fact, *madame* had come to this fête and she was at this moment entering a tent where dancing was going on.

My hopes revived a little, when I was presented to *madame*; after my marriage she had been kind enough to receive me with that graceful and touching cordiality which none but herself possessed.

“Mademoiselle Matilda de Maran is quite a treasure, you are really more fortunate than you deserve to be, Monsieur de Lancry,” she had said, half smiling, half seriously, to Gontran.

I thought that *madame*, by receiving us with her accustomed kindness, would silence the malicious rumours of the world, and that in conformity with courtly custom, all who were present would regulate their own conduct towards us by that of *madame*.

I took Gontran’s arm, and we approached her Royal Highness.

My heart was beating as if it would break.

Those persons who accompanied *madame*, upon seeing us approach, drew themselves back in such a way as to leave a large vacant space between ourselves and the Princess.

I observed with terror that *madame’s* countenance, which was usually so kind in its expression, suddenly darkened and became haughty and severe.

In spite of his assurance, M. de Lancry could not help trembling slightly. He had scarcely bowed to *madame* when her Royal Highness, with a look at my husband in which freezing disdain contended with insulted pride, turned her back upon us without saying a word to him, as if she were indignant at our audacity in presenting ourselves before her.

M. de Lancry turned pale with grief and rage, and I felt so much compassion for him that I found strength to vanquish my offended feelings. I said to him in a firm voice—

“Dearest, forgive *madame*. Kind and generous as she invariably is, she must have been involuntarily prejudiced by the calumnies of the world. Come—come. Do not say a word of this to M. Lugarto, do not let us give this fresh triumph to his malice.”

I drew M. de Lancry away almost by force.

A great number of persons who were anxious to see *madame*, had followed her, so that we were enabled to conceal our confusion in the crowd, and to rejoin M. Lugarto and Madame de Ksernika.

"I have a notion that the Duchess de Berry received you most flatteringly," ironically observed M. Lugarto to M. de Lancry.

"Yes, yes, most flatteringly indeed," replied Gontran with an air of constraint.

I was leaning on Gontran's arm, and his heart beat so quickly and violently that I could feel its pulsations. I perceived that he restrained himself with the utmost difficulty.

"I will not keep you, my good fellow, any longer from Madame de Ksernika," said M. Lugarto.

I pressed close to Gontran, he whispered to me—

"One instant more—take his arm—I entreat you."

He spoke, it seemed to me, in a singularly troubled voice, and he then added in a loud tone.

"And I, my dear Lugarto, will not keep *you* any longer from Madame de Lancry, we understand each other marvellously well. But I thought we were to go and have some ices at Tortoni's this evening!"

"Certainly," replied M. Lugarto, "I was just thinking of it my good fellow, and I should not have let you off that part of our *programme for the evening*," he added with a sarcastic smile.

"Nor I either, my good friend," replied Gontran.

I was in despair, for I had hoped we had got to the end of that miserable evening. All Paris would be at Tortoni's, and our appearance would be the signal for fresh calumnies.

As we returned to our carriage, M. Lugarto whispered to me—

"De Lancry did not take me in, the Duchess de Berry gave him a most humiliating reception. I saw that, by the radiant countenances of the people who accompanied her Royal Highness, for, thanks to the natural advantages for which you are both so remarkable, Gontran is as much detested by the men, as you are by the women. You see now that *the town and the court*, as people used to say, are thoroughly convinced that we are on the best possible terms together—you need not, therefore, have any more fears for your reputation. Suffer me to love you then, and you shall see that I will make myself supportable. Already, this very evening, you have treated me with more kindness. Really I am so fond of you, that, if you choose, you might take away from me all power over your husband."

I made no reply, we got into the carriage, and arrived at Tortoni's. To my great annoyance, Gontran took us into a *salon* on the first floor, where I recognised several persons who had been witnesses of the disdain with which *madame* had received my husband. My confusion reached its height, when I perceived a good many people looking at us with a malicious smile.

"At last," said Gontran, "the time is come."

Not knowing what he meant, I looked at him. The expression

of his countenance terrified me. I recollect that frightful scene, as well as if I were present at it now. Gontran was sitting by me, and opposite to him were Madame de Ksernika, and M. Lugarto. M. de Lancry got up and in a loud and passionate voice said to M. Lugarto.

"Monsieur Lugarto, you are a scoundrel!"

The man, stupified notwithstanding his audacity, was at a loss for an answer. Several men hastily rose from their seats. You might have heard a pin drop in the *salon*. I had not strength to move—I fancied myself in a dream; Gontran however went on.

"Monsieur Lugarto you dare to attack in the world Madame de Lancry's reputation, and to hint that I am a complaisant husband because I am under certain obligations to you. I tell you here to your face that you are an impostor! Madame de Lancry has always treated you with the contempt which you deserve, and you have shamefully abused the intimacy which existed between us, in order to give an appearance of reality to your cowardly calumnies."

The first, the only idea which occurred to me was, that the man would destroy Gontran by revealing the fatal secret which was in his possession.

"My God! my God!" I exclaimed bursting into tears.

Two or three women whom I had met in society, but whom I only knew by sight, came up to me, and surrounded me, with the most touching anxiety; while several men interposed between Gontran and M. Lugarto.

The latter, as his first astonishment wore away, became doubly impudent, and I heard him reply to M. de Lancry with every appearance of constrained and offended dignity.

"I do not understand, sir, the motive of your reproaches. I here declare, publicly, that no one has a more profound respect for Madame de Lancry than myself, and I am completely ignorant of the calumnies to which you allude. As to any obligations which you may be under towards me, I am not aware that I ever uttered a syllable about them to any one. Your attack, sir, is so violent, your accusation such a serious and especially such an unforeseen one—for we have been spending the evening together—that I can only attribute it to some fancy of the moment, which I lament without being able to explain."

"Miserable rascal!" exclaimed Gontran, losing all self-command at the infernal perfidity of M. Lugarto's answer.

"Every one here," said the latter, "will, I hope, understand the position in which, sir, I am placed with regard to yourself, and understand also that there are certain insults which one must know how to put up with."

"And will you put up with this besides?" exclaimed Gontran.

I heard the sound of a blow.

There was a moment's disturbance, above which was heard M. Lugarto's voice, who, as they were dragging him away, exclaimed with an accent of fury which I shall never forget—

"Insult for insult, sir, we are quits. To-morrow all Paris shall know how I revenge myself!"

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A VISIT.

I PASSED a dreadful night. Scarcely had M. de Lancry brought me home, when a nervous attack came on, which deprived me, for the time, of all consciousness. I know not what took place during the long hours which this attack lasted; it ceased, however, about four o'clock in the afternoon. My poor Blondeau was sitting at my bed-side, and weeping in silence. I put my hands to my forehead to bring together, as it were, my recollections. When I remembered the scene which had taken place the evening before, I had no doubt that a duel had taken place.

Alas! even that was the least of my fears, Lugarto had it in his power to destroy Gontran, and perhaps that man had already revealed the secret.

"Where is M. de Lancry?" I exclaimed.

Blondeau gave me a glance of compassionating tenderness and said to me—

"The Viscount went out this morning, madame, he then returned, and afterwards went out again."

"And without being wounded?" I exclaimed.

Blondeau appeared much surprised.

"Wounded? madame—nothing of the sort. Had he been wounded he could not have set out on his journey."

"Journey! what can you mean?"

"The Viscount, when he returned this morning, gave directions for his travelling *nécessaire*, and two or three trunks to be prepared, and he then set off, taking with him his new *valet de chambre*, and leaving this letter for you, madame."

"Gone! gone! without me—and M. de Mortagne's warnings!" I exclaimed. "Oh! there is some sad fatality in this!"

I hastily opened Gontran's letter.

He informed me, in a few lines, that in consequence of the scene of the evening before, a meeting had taken place between himself and M. Lugarto; in which the latter had been slightly wounded. My husband added that he found himself compelled to absent himself for a few days only, in order to bring to a termination the im-

portant affair with which I was already acquainted, he expressed much regret at being compelled to leave me alone, but said that I must easily understand how important and decisive were the measures which he was on the point of attempting to take.

"And by which barrier did M. de Lancry leave Paris? What road did he take?" I enquired of Blondeau, for being desirous to follow M. de Mortagne's express directions never to be separated from Gontran, I was anxious to rejoin him.

"I have not the least idea, madame."

"You must send directly to the *post aux chevaux*, and find out which road M. de Lancry took, and thanks to this information which I shall take care to acquire at every stage, I shall, perhaps, be able to overtake him. We will set off this instant—you must accompany me."

"Set off, madame, in your present state? it is impossible."

"I tell you it is absolutely necessary—you have no idea how important it is."

"What are we to do then, madame, in order to find out the direction which the Viscount has taken? he is not gone in his own carriage, or with post-horses, but he sent for a hackney coach and went away in it with his *valet de chambre*."

"My God! my God!" I exclaimed in despair. I could not understand this hasty departure of Gontran's, and I feared some fresh villany of M. Lugarto's.

I sent Blondeau to enquire if the latter was at Paris, the answer was in the affirmative; and it was added that his wound was a somewhat serious one, and that he would not be able to leave the house for some days. I became terribly uneasy, and shuddered when I recollected that M. de Mortagne had, as it were, foreseen this absence of Gontran's, since he had expressly enjoined me not to quit M. de Lancry. It was in vain that Blondeau questioned those of our servants who had been present at my husband's departure, I was unable to obtain the slightest information. I spent the rest of the day and the ensuing night in inexpressible anguish. I could not understand why M. Lugarto had not put into execution his threat of ruining Gontran, perhaps he had done so, and perhaps my husband, compelled to depart precipitately in order to escape the consequences of that revelation, had been unwilling to alarm me.

I knew not where to seek for information, and I resolved at last, at whatever suffering to myself, to pay a visit to Mademoiselle de Maran. She was more likely than any one to tell me what I wished to know, for she eagerly collected all the odious reports which concerned us. I was just setting off to my aunt's house, when she was announced. Under any other circumstances this visit would have been odious to me, but now I almost thanked heaven for having sent me Mademoiselle de Maran. And yet when

I remarked my aunt's ironical and self-satisfied air, I almost regretted the wish which I had formed.

"Well, well," she began, "what's all this fuss about? What troubles in your conjugal establishment, my dear girl? in that charming model of a complaisant and easy-going ménage? People talk of all kinds of tragedies, but I am sure—and lucky enough that it is so—they will turn out mere farces after all."

"I do not know to what you allude, madame, I am at this moment terribly uneasy about M. de Lancry, for I have not seen him since that cruel scene which will at least have had the effect of overthrowing all the calumnies of which myself and M. de Lancry were the victims."

"What are you talking about, my good girl? Are you mad enough to fancy that the scene at Tortoni's produced any good effect?"

"I believe, madame, that those respectable persons who heard M. de Lancry so clearly establish the infamy of M. Lugarto, will not suffer themselves to become the echoes of reports which are still more ridiculous than they are odious. If no one will defend us for the future, at least no one will attack us."

"Don't talk to me about your proofs: that husband of yours has proved nothing at all! Do you suppose people were the dupes of all that fine piece of acting?"

"Acting! madame, acting!"

"Certainly, how could Lugarto make any other answer than he did, to Gontran's savage attack? Was he to confess before all the world that you had been excessively good-natured to him! And so, my dear girl, you are simple enough to suppose that yourself and your husband are as white as snow, because M. Lugarto proclaimed your innocence in the face of Tortoni's chandelier! Why common politeness alone must have obliged him to do that, and a man must be a low, vulgar fellow to behave in any other way. My testimony cannot be suspicious, for I think this Lugarto the greatest fool in the world with his mania for a title and his *stars of gold in a field of silver*, but I must own with the rest of the world, that on this occasion he behaved with all manner of moderation and reserve, and with a nonpareil sort of dignity. Has he not, for the sake of your beautiful eyes, allowed himself to be menaced, insulted, and almost knocked on the head by your husband, without a word of complaint, but on the contrary, in defence of your reputation? Come—come—Galaor and Orondates were monsters of brutality and conceit compared to this poor Lugarto."

I could not find a word to reply to Mademoiselle de Maran, and my experience of the world was already such a sad one that I did not doubt such an interpretation as my aunt suggested, might be put upon the conduct M. de Lancry and M. Lugarto.

Completely overcome I suffered my head to droop down upon my bosom, Mademoiselle de Maran proud of her triumph, continued with a cruel pleasure.

"The worst part of the business for Gontran is, that, besides all the rest, Lugarto behaved admirably in the duel, he was wounded; honor, as they call it, was satisfied, and after all, this fine Cræsus might very well have refused to meet Gontran at all—as according to general report, your worthy husband is unfortunate enough to owe an enormous deal of money to his antagonist. Now, between ourselves, re-imbursing a creditor by running him through the body is a curious way of paying one's debts. But since Lugarto is satisfied with that kind of money, no one has any right to complain. It only proves that he loves you to distraction, and even since his wound, I fairly tell you he never mentions your name, but with all the most touching pastoral and Corydon-like whinnings imaginable."

"And so, Madame, since that scene M. de Lancry and myself have fallen a little lower in the opinion of the world," I replied with a calmness that surprised Mademoiselle de Maran, "and M. Lugarto on the contrary, excites the most touching interest?"

"You speak like an oracle, my darling girl, that is just the case, neither more or less, and you see me quite agitated and overcome in consequence. I just dropped in to tell you the news, and to say, rather late in the day perhaps, but better repent late than never, that I am in despair at having consented to your marriage with Gontran. Who would ever have thought he would turn out so badly? Do you know that Mortagne, crack-brained fellow as he is, was not so far short of the mark, after all? But whatever any one might say, or any one might think, there was no possibility of driving that *Beau Mari* out of your head, poor little one! only think, hardly four months after marriage and behold you with a husband, condemned, ruined, unfaithful! really it is enough to break one's heart! I know well that you will tell me the conduct of your unfaithful husband, may have justified you in giving him *tit for tat*—and that Lugarto is by no means without his merits in spite of his yellow wax countenance, his epilepsies, and his mania for title. Nevertheless, when they speak to me of your *engouement* for him I am disgusted and indignant."

"Really, Madam!"

"Really—but how well you take all I say to you! you do not seem to care a fig about it!"

"No, Madame—you see I am quite calm—I am even touched at the feeling which dictates the consolations that you have given me."

"And you may well feel it—but did I tell you that when they

spoke to me of your penchant for Lugarto, I was disgusted, I said to those scandal mongers, ' You will be every one of you furiously out in your calculations, if you knew the why and the how of the taste of the little viscountess de Lancry for Monsieur Lugarto—there is in that young woman a sort of courageous abnegation of self, something in the style of the heroines of old, a kind of cross between Portia and the Mother of the Gracchi ! ' But it is true what I am telling you. To see you now so calm who would think that your husband was rendering you the most miserable of women, and that whether right or wrong your reputation and his are gone for ever ! but pray tell me, now that I think of it, if its wrongfully that they accuse you, how frightful that must be for you ! ”

“ Listen, Madame,” said I to Mademoiselle de Maran with a degree of *sang froid* which confounded her, “ you are come here, to enjoy your triumph, to see if your designs have been well accomplished, to see if the young wife is as unhappy as the young girl, the infant, was made. Is it not so, Madame ? ”

“ Go on, I shall answer you presently. It is astonishing how clear sighted you are. ”

“ Well, Madame ! I am going to inflict on you a terrible blow—I am going by one stroke to avenge myself for all the evil you have done to me, and you still wish to accomplish. ”

“ It is wonderful ! but you do not frighten me at all, little one. ”

“ Look steadfastly at me, madame, listen to the tone of my voice, remark well the expression of my features—you who have so much penetration, see if I lie. ”

“ To the fact—to the fact,” said Mademoiselle de Maran with bitterness.

“ Well then, madame, I love Gontran as much as I have ever loved him, do you hear ? I love him with passion. I love him even better than before, for he is unfortunate—in that love consists my strength—my courage. It is my consolation—thanks to that love—I have already emerged, wounded perhaps but still smiling, from the most cruel struggles. Thanks to that love, in short, I defy the future, with a calm and serene brow. ”

There was such an accent of truthfulness in my words, my countenance animated by the force of my convictions, was doubtless so radiant, that my aunt, unable to conceal her rage, exclaimed—

“ I really believe she may be telling the truth ! After all there are women fools enough to bewitched by a man in this manner ! Stupid wretches, you might knock their brains out with a bludgeon and they would still cry out with all manner of languishing and voluptuous transports, just like the dupes of the deacon Pâris in their convulsions—*Oh ! delicious pleasure ! oh ! ineffable rapture !* ”

Then with an involuntary return to her former habits my aunt squeezed my arm violently, and exclaimed,

"You must be either blind, mad, or an idiot then?"

My aunt's fury had a beneficial effect upon me, my love for Gontran was understood, and that love was able and certain to console me for everything, since Mademoiselle de Maran was so enraged at perceiving that I felt it.

"You ought to be shut up in a mad-house," repeated my aunt.

"I love him, madame, and that is all I have to say to you."

"She will drive me distracted with all these sugar plum devices of hers in their various tones of sweetness—*I love him! I love him!! I love him!!!* A fine answer upon my word! You love him, but he has ruined you—but he owes enormous sums to this Lugarto—but you will be reduced to beggary the instant that man shall exact payment."

"I shall share that beggary with Gontran, madame."

"But he is dishonored in the eyes of the world."

"He is not so in mine."

"But he despises you—but he has allowed you to be compromised by this Lugarto."

"Gontran is secure of my love."

"He is so secure of it that he loves you no longer."

"But *I love him*, madame."

I know not with what accent I pronounced these last words, but Mademoiselle de Maran stamped violently and furiously exclaimed,

"The devil himself has got into her head! this love of hers has turned into madness, she is incurable now."

"Yes—oh! yes! you have spoken the truth, mademoiselle, it is a madness, but at least it is a holy and a noble one! It concentrates all the powers of my heart, all the energies of my soul upon Gontran. All that is not for *him* exists not for me—to live *his* life, however hard, however painful, however humiliating that life may be, is my sole desire: you are right, I am mad. What is madness but an exaggerated feeling which swallows up all other feelings? yes, then I am mad. Like the mad, I have cherished, adored, and intoxicating recollections which come every instant to cast a ray over my soul, and to transport me into an ideal world; the recollection of those ineffable days which I spent with him, when I was so proud of being beautiful and young, because he loved that youth and that beauty."

"But he is tired by this time of your beauty, and as to your youth that is a fine advantage! You will only have the longer to suffer."

"*You*, madame, are no competent judge of these questions of youth and beauty, or rather you can appreciate them too well—and

it is that which causes your rage. But there is justice in heaven, and it forces you to feel the tortures of envy—It has reserved a terrible punishment for you, the punishment of seeing me, in spite of all, and for ever, happy, happy too in him, who, according to your calculations, was to inflict upon me my most cruel sufferings! Be assured, madame, *he* might say to me to-morrow—‘Depart—I detest you’—and even then he could not tear from my heart that treasure of worshipped recollections, on which I could exist for ages. Let Gontran be however contemptuous, however unpitying, he cannot make the past never to have taken place, that past as glorious in its enchantments as some fairy tale—that past in which I will take refuge when the present becomes sombre and obscured.”

“Ha! ha! how surprising and diverting she is with her dear little past! Don’t talk such nonsense to me! Was it not for your money he married you? If you had been as ugly and wicked as the seven capital sins he would have married you just the same.”

“You may judge then, madame, how happy I feel at being rich, beautiful and affectionate, all at once.”

“But this is intolerable! but a strait jacket is the only thing for such frenzy!” exclaimed my aunt, losing all command of herself. “But, after all, he will die some day, he must die, this beloved and handsome idol of yours! How will you console yourself then? ha! ha! ha! I’ve got you there, answer me that.”

“In this world I will pray to God for him, in the next I shall meet him again. My existence, madame, will thus be passed between prayer and hope.”

My aunt hastily rose, and exclaimed.

“Pooh, pooh! this is a wager, a sheer piece of obstinacy and bravado of which I am not the dupe, you are so proud that you put a good face upon your misfortunes! you would sooner burst with despair and rage than cry before me! Very well, my dear, just as you like. You are happy, very happy, superlatively happy, an’t you? Much good may it do you. I was disposed to pity your sorrows, but I find that you are blessed with such a robust temperament as far as the pains of the heart are concerned, that I shall trouble myself no more about it. It was my duty, as an act of charity, to tell you what people said about you and your handsome Alcindor, but you think it all very simple and natural. So much the better. Only don’t expect now that I shall take your part or pity you in the least. We shall see where this fine obstinacy will bring you to.”

My aunt went away infuriated.

I exulted in my firmness and in the kind of revelation for which I was indebted to my aunt’s visit. Perhaps had it not been for her

violent attacks I should not have seen so clearly into my heart—I should never have dared to put to myself the questions which she had asked me. There are some suppositions so painful or so horrible, that the heart instinctively refuses to linger upon them, but once admitted, and once solved, one is almost happy that they have been raised. My aunt's visit then had produced a contrary effect to what she had expected.

This discussion enlightened me still more as to the profoundness of my devotion to M. de Lancry. Before, I might have doubted myself, but now doubt was impossible, for I had considered, without shrinking, the most terrible hazards that my affection could undergo. Alas! that powerful conviction was but too much needed that I might resist the fresh blows which menaced me.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE JOURNEY.

A FRESH misfortune now assailed me. My poor Blondeau became ill, and my medical attendant seemed astonished at this indisposition which was almost a sudden one, and which, without being serious, kept the excellent woman in a continual state of strange torpor and drowsiness. My uneasiness on Gontran's account increased more and more. I knew not in whom to confide, and I sent to Madame de Richeville's. She was, however, still in Anjou, and the probable period of her return was uncertain.

M. de Mortagne had not appeared in Paris since the day on which he had addressed a letter to M. de Rochegune, at my house. How, bitterly I now regretted Ursula, my only friend! I might at least have told her my sorrows, even had she been unable to advise me how to act.

She often wrote to me, and her letters were sad and melancholy ones. She was unhappy, not that her husband was deficient in attentions, and complaisance towards her, but *he did not understand her*. She complained of the monotony of her existence, and regretted our childhood. Since my entrance into society, I had not formed an intimate friendship with any one of my own sex, even while I was compelled to acknowledge the noble qualities of Madame de Richeville, I always in spite of myself felt a vague kind of jealousy in regard to the Duchess. She too had loved Gontran! My condition therefore was a totally isolated one, I was surrounded by servants who had but recently entered my service; almost my whole establishment had been renewed, and of my two maids, the one of older standing had not been with me more than six weeks. Blon-

deau's indisposition therefore deprived me of the only person upon whose friendly feelings I could at that minute rely.

Three days elapsed, and I had no tidings of Gontran.

About five o'clock in the evening, Fritz, the valet de chambre, whom Gontran had taken with him, arrived in one of those cabriolets which are procured at posting establishments, and brought me a letter from my husband; I was astonished at the information which it contained.

Gontran was ill; and was waiting for me at Chantilly, in a house to which his messenger would conduct me. M. de Lancry desired me upon receipt of his letter to send for post horses immediately, and to set off with Blondeau and Fritz in order to rejoin him.

"It is of the utmost importance to me," added M. de Lancry, "that it should not yet be known at Paris, that you have come to me, you will therefore desire your servants to reply to all visitors, that you are gone to spend a few days at Madame Sécherin's. You will write also to the same effect, to Mademoiselle de Maran, my uncle M. de Versac, and the Princess Ksernika. *I implore you* to do this Matilda, whatever repugnance you may feel in writing to the latter person, the important point is that it should be clearly understood in the world, that you are going to Ursula and not to me. I will explain all this mystery to you. Fortunately it is one that will not last long. You may place implicit confidence in Fritz, my messenger, he will conduct you to Chantilly, where, oh my good and beloved Matilda, I am waiting for you. Courage! I hope there are still bright days in store for us."

I confess, my delight at the prospect of seeing Gontran again was perhaps greater than the uneasiness which his indisposition caused me. I gave the necessary directions for our immediate departure. Although unwilling to question one of my own servants I asked Fritz if M. de Lancry had been taken ill during his journey, or at his return.

"I cannot inform *Madame la Vicomtesse*," was his reply. "On our arrival from Paris, *M. le Vicomte* left me near Chantilly, in the house where he is waiting for Madame, he went away by himself three days ago, and returned unaccompanied, this morning. *M. le Vicomte* seemed fatigued and unwell, he ordered me to take a cabriolet at the posting house, and to come for madame."

A foolish hope glanced through my mind. I thought for an instant that Gontran had deceived me in announcing that our little house had been pulled down, that he was preparing a surprise for me, and that it was that blessed retreat in which we were to escape from the wicked calumnies of the world. I nourished such a pious adoration for that period of my past life, that, with a scrupulousness which was almost exaggerated, I would not profane—if I may use the expression—my cherished memories of the past and my as cherished

hopes for the future, by asking a single question of Fritz upon the subject. In compliance with Gontran's directions, I wrote word to Mademoiselle de Maran, M. de Versac, and Madame de Ksernika, that I was going to spend a few days in the country with Ursula ; and I gave orders at home that the same answer should be made to any visitors who might come to see me. I was sorry that I was unable to take Blondeau with me, but I did not even think of mentioning my intended departure to her, for in spite of her indisposition she would have insisted upon accompanying me. I went to see her in her room. She scarcely recognized me, there was no alteration in her features, and she did not seem to be suffering any pain, but was only plunged into a complete stupor.

At six o'clock I left Paris.

The maid who accompanied me, with M. de Lancry's valet de chambre, was a melancholy sort of girl, and her countenance displeased me, though I knew not why. It was now the end of June, the sky was sombre, the air heavy, and the heat suffocating, while a storm threatened in the distance. In spite of the long daylight, at half-past seven night had almost completely set in ; just at the time when I was changing horses at Ecouen. Thunder began to be heard some way off, and a flash of lightning was occasionally seen. The atmosphere became still more oppressive. While we were changing horses a trifling dispute arose between my servant and the last postillions. I only mention this fact, apparently so unimportant a one, because it produced serious consequences afterwards. Till then the postillions had, I believe, received each four francs, as I had given directions that they should use the utmost speed, but at this stage, Fritz, I do not know why, wanted to limit the gratuity to three. The postillion came to the window to complain ; and I ordered Fritz to pay him what he asked, adding that I was, above all things, desirous of proceeding with the utmost rapidity, as I was in a great hurry to arrive.

The master of the posting house, who was present at this little dispute, enjoined the postillions to use the utmost caution when they arrived at the declivity of Luzarches, as the road was almost entirely unpaved at that spot, in consequence of the repairs which were then being made. There were lanterns moreover fixed up there to warn travellers of the danger.

We left Ecouen.

The darkness increased, and large drops of rain began to fall. I feared the thunder might alarm the horses, and that some unforeseen accident might delay my arrival at the place where I was to meet Gontran. In other respects I contemplated with a melancholy calmness, these signs which were the forerunners of the tempest. Alas ! those great phenomena of nature, awful and terrible as they are, are far less fearful than those evil passions so hidden and so

A flash of lightning enabled me to distinguish perfectly a carriage with two white horses, which were rushing on with impetuous rapidity.

The next instant everything was once more in darkness.

A terrible idea occurred to me, if those ill-fated wretches who were thus rushing upon certain destruction should not be our pursuers! I mechanically extended my hands and cried out "Stop! stop!"

Another flash shewed me the carriage borne along with irresistible impetuosity. It was now within twenty steps of the heap of stones on which it must inevitably be dashed to pieces. Good God! what were my feelings when I fancied I recognized a sort of peculiarly shaped *britzka*, which belonged to M. de Mortagne and in which he had arrived from Italy, at my aunt's house, on the day when my marriage contract was signed! Gontran had often discussed with me the convenient but strange construction of that carriage.

As I beheld the two luminous specks upon which my eyes were fixed, suddenly disappear, I uttered a piercing shriek and covered my eyes with my hands as if I had assisted at the frightful catastrophe which I dreaded. At this instant our horses, who had arrived at the top of the hill which we had been mounting, finding themselves once more upon level ground, set off with fresh speed. It was in vain that I called to the postillions, the noise of the wheels overpowered my voice, and they did not hear me—I threw myself back in the carriage with despair.

By degrees, fearing to dwell upon the idea that M. de Mortagne was perhaps the victim of a fearful accident, I attempted to persuade myself, and did at last persuade myself that I had been mistaken. Besides there might be another carriage of the same shape, or M. de Mortagne might have sold his, and M. Lugarto might have purchased it; by these means I calmed, or rather, deadened my terror. I strove to persuade myself that M. Lugarto was our pursuer, and that a most providential punishment had overtaken the man who had done us so much harm. At last I was about to see Gontran. This hope alone comforted me. M. de Lancry informed by the messenger who had passed us, would clear up my doubts upon the subject. After continuing upon the high road for about another half hour, I perceived that we were quitting the pavement, and that we were now taking a cross road. The night was so dark that I could not see whether we had entered the forest or not. After proceeding for some time we suddenly stopped. The tempest still continued.

I beheld a gloomy looking house all the shutters of which were closed. Fritz got down, knocked, and the door was opened. My heart beat as if it would break, when I thought I was about to see

Gontran again. I hastily entered the house while my servants occupied themselves in unloading the carriage. An elderly woman, who was a stranger to me, requested me to walk into a little parlour on the ground floor.

"Where is M. de Lancry?" I exclaimed.

"*M. le Vicomte* has left this letter for madame—"

"Good God! M. de Lancry is not here then?"

"*M. le Vicomte* will not return before to-morrow night, as he has doubtless told madame in this letter."

Extremely uneasy at M. de Lancry's absence, I took the letter which the woman offered me, and read as follows—

"Do not torment yourself, my dear Matilda, I am this instant setting off to take advantage of a most fortunate circumstance which places it in my power to *terminate everything*, and to devote myself hereafter to your happiness alone. Courage! my tender and generous Matilda, our evil days are passed. Wait for me, I shall be back to-morrow evening at the latest, if you like the house we will remain there till we are able to settle ourselves at your château de Maran. Adieu! consolation, hope of my existence, pardon me for the sorrows I have caused you and love me a little."

Although this fresh departure annoyed me sensibly, I resigned myself as well as I could, consoling myself with the reflection that on the next day I should see M. de Lancry once more. Besides how delightful for me! Gontran was about to realize my secret hopes, he promised to live alone with me in this retreat. I had recently witnessed such mysterious events, that I could not feel surprised at this new and sudden absence.

"Did not a man on horseback come here to-night with very important intelligence for M. de Lancry?" I enquired of the woman.

"No, madame, I have seen nobody."

"Call Fritz this instant," I said, completely astonished.

"*M. le Vicomte* instructed Fritz to take the carriage and horses back to Chantilly, madame, for there is no coach-house or stables here, he is already set off, and did not even enter the house."

"What! did not a man on horseback come here from Paris to-night?"

"No, Madame."

What could have become of the messenger? what had he to tell M. de Lancry? I began to feel uneasy at finding myself in this isolated house, among people with whom I was unacquainted. I more particularly regretted that I had not Blondeau with me. Was M. Lugarto my pursuer? If I admitted this hypothesis, I felt scarcely any apprehensions, for his carriage must have been dashed to pieces on the road, and he would be unable to continue his

journey, but if I had deceived myself, if instead of him it were M. de Mortagne. This was a fearful thought, and I would not suffer myself to dwell upon it. The woman who had received me, asked me if she should bring up the supper. I had left Paris without dining, I was dropping with fatigue, and I resolved to eat that I might regain my strength.

The woman left the room.

The drawing-room was furnished with elegance, the draperies were crimson, and it was lighted by several tapers placed in gilt chandeliers. I recognised Gontran's taste in certain details, I scarcely yet dared to hope that I should inhabit this house, perhaps for a long time, with M. de Lancry. Presently the woman who had received me on my arrival, brought a little table luxuriously served, and told me that M. de Lancry had ordered the supper himself, I was touched by this attention of Gontran's, and I dismissed the woman that I might be alone, and think over at liberty, the events of the day. After having taken a few spoonfuls of soup, the breast of a chicken, and two or three glasses of water just coloured with a little Bordeaux, for I was suffering much from thirst, (it will be seen presently, why I dwell upon these trifling details), I pushed back the table, and drew my arm chair up to the fire place, although there was no fire in the grate. The tempest still growled in the distance, a violent gale of wind had sprung up, and you might hear its long and melancholy moanings. In a short time I gave myself up to the fatigue which I felt morally as well as physically, my eyelids closed in spite of myself, but determined not to yield to sleep so soon, I hastily rose, took a few steps across the room, and by chance approached a door which seemed to communicate with an adjoining apartment.

Whether it was the wind, or the effect of my imagination ; I fancied I heard a deep and melancholy sigh behind that door.

I hastily drew back much alarmed, and I felt a vague presentiment of impending evil.

Seizing a bell-rope which I perceived at one of the sides of the fire place, I pulled it violently, no one however came.

Again I rang with still more violence—no one came.

I rang a third time, but with no better success.

Terrified at the death-like silence which pervaded the house, I threw myself into an arm-chair, and hid my face in my hands. It then seemed to me that an irresistible feeling of torpor, was, as it were, nailing me to my seat, my limbs became heavy, and I thought that an unconquerable drowsiness was stealing over me. Afraid of falling asleep, and determined to find my maid, or the woman who had waited upon me, I repressed my terror, and taking a candle from the table, I resolutely advanced towards the door which opened into

the ante-chamber. My hand was upon the handle of the lock, when I heard it move with a harsh and repeated sound.

The door was at that instant double locked on the outside.

In the suddenness of my alarm I shook the door, it was impossible to open it.

Stupified with terror, and beginning then to have a vague idea of the most horrible machinations, I went to the window and opened it, the shutters also were barred on the outside.

In despair I rushed to the door behind which I had fancied I heard a sigh.

At that door appeared M. Lugarto.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### REVELATIONS.

M. LUGARTO was extremely pale, and his countenance bore an expression of infernal malice ; such as I had never seen it assume before.

"The inhabitants of this house are creatures of mine. Every door is barred, and no human power can extricate you from this place, before to-morrow."

Such were this man's first words.

Completely stupified, I looked at him with a bewildered air, without the power of replying a word.

Suddenly, rushing to one of the windows, I exclaimed,

"Do not come near me ! do not come near me !"

He shrugged his shoulders, sat down in an arm chair, and said to me,

"Let us have a little conversation together—I have a great deal to tell you." He drew a pocket book from his pocket and placed it upon a table. "Pray sit down," he continued, "it will be a long story and you must be fatigued."

"God Almighty ! have mercy upon me !" I exclaimed, falling on my knees upon an arm-chair, and I put up a most fervent prayer to heaven.

M. Lugarto felt in his pocket book, took out some papers, and shewing them to me—said,

"There is something that will surprise you. But let us proceed in due order."

Encouraged by the pious invocation which I had just addressed to God, I got up, and with a look of resolution at M. Lugarto, I said to him.

"There is a God in heaven, and I have friends on earth."

"Of course you have, and myself before all. But, if you are relying also upon M. de Mortagne, you are wrong, his carriage was dashed to pieces at the declivity of Luzarches, and he was left half-killed upon the spot."

"It was true then? that carriage which was pursuing us—"

"Was his—Oh! Fritz is worth his weight in gold. I knew very well what I was about when I ordered your husband to take him."

Thunderstruck for an instant at this fatal intelligence, I soon recovered some hopes, thinking that M. Lugarto could not be acquainted with M. de Mortagne's fate.

"You are lying, sir!" I exclaimed, "Even, taking for granted the misfortune which you announce, still you cannot have received any details respecting M. de Mortagne's situation; for Fritz never left me."

"Nor was it Fritz, but one of the two men whom I had enjoined to follow your carriage at some distance, from the time when you left Paris, that told me this good piece of news. Without having been in the army like my good friend Lancry, I still know how useful a rear-guard may prove to be. And just see how well the arrangement answered! One of the two men perceiving that M. de Mortagne was endeavouring to overtake you, rode forward at full speed to inform Fritz first, and then me—the other *escort*, kept a little way off M. de Mortagne's carriage to watch it; and having perceived the overturn of your *saviour* at the declivity of Luzarches, and seen him taken out of his carriage half dead, arrived here—like a faithful servant as he is—a quarter of an hour after you, having left his horse at some distance off, in order not to rouse your suspicions. In short as a proof that you have no more reason to hope for, than I have to dread, the presence of M. de Mortagne, here I am, you see, perfectly comfortable, and, as people say, making myself quite at home."

What M. Lugarto said was unfortunately so probable, that I was compelled to banish all hope, and I sighed when I thought of the fatality which had deprived me of the assistance, that Providence was sending to me.

"Oh! he's a crafty dog that M. de Mortagne," continued M. Lugarto—"he and that Rochegune, whom the devil confound, have fastened themselves to my steps for the last two months, and acting as they did in secret, have already defeated two or three of my projects which concerned yourself, my lovely enemy! They bribed some of my servants whom I had fancied to be incorruptible. Fortunately, Fritz already, some time ago, half killed that Rochegune when he was dancing attendance at your garden gate, in order to hear an account of your precious health, during your illness."

"It was M. de Rochegune then? Oh God! an assassination!"

"Pooh! pooh! what do you take me for? Merely a bit of a quar-

rel and a knock on the head, that's all. Rohegune took precious good care to say nothing about the matter. That virtuous and philanthropic young man knew, as well as I did, that if he had made any complaints, he would have had to explain how, and for what purpose, he came every night to play the sentinel at your garden gate. That might have compromised you, so I was pretty sure he would hold his tongue."

"As cowardly, as traitorous, and cruel," I said clasping my hands with horror,

"Cowardly, no, *nervous* if you like. How can I help it? I am weak enough to be particularly fond of life. By-the-bye, you must think me a confoundedly inexperienced lover, or a confoundedly cold one. Here I have in my power an enchanting woman, the most adorable woman without contradiction Paris ever saw, and I am quietly telling her all my tricks, instead of talking to her about my flame. But do not be in a hurry, I will explain to you this conduct which perhaps you think is a little too respectful. You see that clock don't you? It is half-past eleven—well! before twelve you will be in a profound and irresistible sleep—at twelve o'clock, therefore, you will be in my power. Just now, at supper, you took an infallible narcotic; and you must even already have experienced some little symptoms of drowsiness—now then, let's talk till *the hour of my bliss* arrives."

I gave a terrible scream—for I remembered the kind of transitory lethargy which I had just before attributed to sleepiness and fatigue.

"Have mercy upon me," I exclaimed, falling on my knees. "This is horrible. What have I done to you? good God! mercy! mercy!"

M. Lugarto burst into a loud laugh, and said to me,

"Why, madame, what *is* the matter with you? what do you wish? why do you reproach me? Here I am, in my arm chair, as quiet as a lamb, a good way off from you, and contemplating you with the most profound respect. Really to see you looking so scared and imploring, one would suppose I was playing the part of Tarquin. Come, come, my beautiful Lucretia; you are unjust. Do you know that, if I had any conceit about me, I should be apt to think that you are reproaching me for my reserve—in order to provoke my audacity."

I questioned, if I may use the expression, all my sensations at that moment, with a terrible anxiety. I pressed my hands to my forehead, it was burning: my head seemed heavy, my eye lids were weighed down. At each of these fatal discoveries I shuddered with terror, I tried to get up from my knees, but I felt them give way under me.

"But this is not sleep!" I exclaimed in my despair. "No—it is an agony—a living agony. Oh it is too frightful! Oh! my God!

my God! Is it an illusion? But—again—no—no. I feel my strength deserting me—a cloud is spreading over my eyes. God of Heaven! God of vengeance! *will thou not come to my assistance?*”

Alas! whether my imagination, impressed by M. Lugarto's revelation, had hastened the effects of the narcotic which I had taken, or whether it were merely the natural operation of the drug, I know not, but I began to experience a kind of languor and invincible drowsiness. In spite of myself I fell down in a sitting posture, upon an arm chair near the table on which that fatal supper had been served.

I was agitated with a convulsive trembling, I could scarcely speak, and in my terror I used, but vainly, the most imploring gestures to that monster.

“I was sure enough of the effect that draught of mine would have,” he continued, “for I have tried it several times already. That's right, you are sitting down, presently you will become wholly incapable of moving—but you will be able to hear me for some time yet—listen to me then, it will distract your attention.”

I could hear him indeed but already, vaguely, I fancied I was the sport of some monstrous night-mare, my eyes were fixed. That man seemed to me at that instant to be almost endowed with some supernatural power.

He was silent for a moment, whilst he was looking for some papers.

The wind moaned down the chimney in redoubled gusts. I felt an increasing torpor subjugate, little by little, all my faculties, twice I attempted to get up, and to call for assistance, but my strength and my voice both failed me.

“I tell you it is no use,” said Lugarto, shrugging his shoulders, “but listen to me—you shall know all about your dearly beloved Gontran, and the secret of my aversion towards him. Two years ago, at Paris, I had discovered, in the most humble situation, a pearl of grace, a treasure of beauty, a noble heart, an enchanting mind, in a word, a most adorable young girl, to whom I had not revealed what I really was. That young girl loved me, but she would not transgress her duty—irritated by opposition, I became so desperately enamoured of her, I thought her so beautiful, so good, so ingenuous, that I should have been mad enough to marry her, for hers was one of those virtues which, notwithstanding their severity, attract instead of repulsing. Hell threw in my way Gontran de Lancry, I became intimate with him, I confided to him my love, my projects; and I introduced him to that young girl as my dearest friend. A month after that introduction he had supplanted me with her, had revealed my name, calumniated my intentions, and seduced that poor girl who had been hitherto so pure. The unhappy creature, abandoned soon after by Lancry, committed

suicide. That's what your husband did to me—he seared, he sullied, he destroyed the only real love which, perhaps, I had ever experienced in my life! At one blow, and for ever he ulcerated my heart and my pride, by robbing me so contemptuously of a conquest that I would have purchased with my hand—and that is what I will never forgive him. Ah! you do not know what that man has made me suffer!”

M. Lugarto seemed to lay aside his freezing irony as he pronounced these last words in an accent of profound emotion.

“You have at least then known *one* generous, *one* pure sentiment!” I exclaimed. “In the name of that sentiment, of that cruel but sacred memory have mercy upon me—I feel my strength is forsaking me.”

M. Lugarto replied with a loud laugh.

“How childish you are! It is natural enough—if I gave you a narcotic, it was on purpose that it should operate. Your drowsiness will go on increasing in this way, till you fall into a profound sleep. To return to Lancry: if I have forgotten that young girl, there still remains in my heart the madness of having been sacrificed to Gontran, and the thirst for revenge. Had I been brave enough to fight with Lancry, I think I should have killed him, so intense was my hatred of that man, but, as I told you before, I am *nervous* and I waited. And then revenge is *very good eaten cold*, as the vulgar say—Besides I know not what mysterious voice warned me, that sooner or later Gontran could not escape me. Last year I was in London, he came there, bringing with him the last remains of his fortune: he was desirous of appearing in a sort of factitious splendour that he might entrap and marry some rich heiress. I went to him with every appearance of frankness, I began by laughing at the excellent trick which he had played me in depriving me of that young girl; he laughed at it also, and was delighted to find that I took the thing so well; we resumed our former intimacy. This marriage did not make much progress, I had spread the report of his ruin, and of his mercenary designs, adding that he ridiculed beforehand the heiresses whom he expected to take in his matrimonial toils. The aristocratic pride of the young Misses of the three kingdoms revolted at the secret pretensions of this insolent Frenchman, which I had betrayed. In short, in spite of his fine name, his wit, and his extraordinary good looks, advantages of his which I abhorred, the excellent Lancry could not even manage to marry some obscure city heiress. But I see you are getting more and more sleepy,” added M. Lugarto, “this drowsiness, however, has not yet reached your mental faculties, it is at present merely a physical torpor. I will continue, therefore, for I see by the expression of your countenance that you perfectly understand what I am saying. Lancry

then had exhausted his last resources, in this chase of his after heiresses. His uncle the Duke de Versac refused to give him another farthing, and your beloved Gontran was very nearly on his last legs, when the devil inspired him. He borrowed money of me for the first time, and from that day he was in my power. I lent him a thousand louis so readily, and he knew my fortune to be so enormous, that he accepted without scruple, and applied to me again. I met his wishes half way, and lent him another and a more considerable sum. This quite turned his head and he looked upon me in the light of a milch cow. I charitably advised him for his own interest to make a more magnificent display than ever. The world had believed him to be a ruined man, so he must come out in renewed splendour and announce that he had just inherited a fresh fortune, then he must infallibly hook some wealthy match. As for the expenditure, I was there, my income was three or four millions, and he was to repay me when he was once married to a fortune. It was a kind of speculation for which I would advance him the funds, and I would not ask for a re-imbursement till the profits had been realized.

"This seems foolish enough on my part, doesn't it? for after all Lancry's matrimonial projects might fail, and it would have been all up with my money, although afterwards he gave me bonds which I have got there. But to ensure the success of a certain project which I had planned with tolerable adroitness, it was requisite to inspire him with a blind confidence in my generosity and my friendship—you will see that I made a good use of my money. Every time I lent him any considerable sum, I gave him a simple draft upon my banker signed by me: pray pay attention to this. One day I suddenly left London without informing Lancry, and without telling him where I was going. I knew that he was then without money. I sent him a Jew, who was a remarkably sharp fellow, and who offered to lend him thirty thousand livres upon his simple signature. Lancry, who depended upon me to re-imburse the sum, signed the paper. I was at Brighton, at which place, however, I was informed of all his movements. My project was now ripe. Gold is an enchanter's wand. Some time after he had borrowed the money, I seriously proposed to Lancry a certain heiress who had an income of fifty thousand *écus*. I knew the parents of the young girl, and they reposed the utmost confidence in me. I had pledged myself, (the security was to be on my own fortune,) that Lancry should bring more than two millions into the marriage settlements, only I engaged the parents not to enter into money matters till my return. Lancry was accustomed to give himself out invariably, with the utmost effrontery, as possessing an income of a million a year, he was introduced to the young lady, favourably received, and a day was appointed for the pecuniary

arrangements. When things had got as far as this, I wrote to Lancry from Brighton, in his reply he asked me for two thousand louis to pay the Jew, for the note of hand had not long to run, and there was a risk of his being arrested, as the creditor would shew him no mercy. Now it would have been an atrocious thing for Lancry to be thrown into prison at the very moment when he was about to marry a woman with fifty thousand *écus* a year, and thus to see all his brilliant hopes dashed to the ground. The day had now arrived next before that on which the note of hand would fall due, I had calculated everything to a nicety; Lancry's anxiety was dreadful, when, oh! miracle of heaven! blessed manna of the sky! I sent Gontran, by the post, but without any letter of address, remark this well, a draft for two thousand louis payable at sight, on my banker, and consisting merely of these words, as usual—'*Good for two thousand pounds sterling—Brighton—Comte de Lugarto.*' I merely wrote a line to Gontran to tell him that I was about to leave Brighton, and that I would let him know afterwards where I was. I had arranged so that this draft should arrive by the post in the evening. Lancry had a *valet de chambre* whom I had recommended to him. Lancry put the draft in a drawer, and went out without taking the key—prudence being by no means the *forte* of that dear husband of yours—the valet took the draft according to my directions, and sent it back to me. Next day Lancry looked for his draft—it was not to be found—he questioned the valet—but obtained no tidings of it. The valet played his part to perfection, and declared he did not know what his master meant. Then came the Jew, who insisted upon having his money, and threatened to tell the young lady's family, and so break off the marriage. Lancry in despair beheld himself on the point of losing his heiress for the want of that cursed draft, he burst out into a tempest of fury, and in his rage he told his valet, in whom, by the way, he had implicit confidence, of the atrocious dilemma in which he was placed. My rascal then, following my instructions to the letter, after a good deal of sham hesitation made the following suggestion to his master. "*M. le comte de Lugarto*, had sent to *M. le Vicomte* a draft for two thousand louis, it was therefore his intention to lend him two thousand louis, but *M. le Vicomte* has somehow mislaid the draft. What harm would there be in *M. le Vicomte's* writing another draft?" 'What! wretch, a forgery?' 'But since *M. de Lugarto* sent a draft to *M. le Vicomte*, which draft has been lost, it comes to the same thing. What injury would it do any one to write another? Your dear Gontran, after a few conscientious scruples, yielded to this plausible argument for forgery, and an hour afterwards he presented a draft forged with my name, at my banker's. Oh, oh! this awakens you a little does

it? added M. Lugarto, seeing that I was lifting myself with an effort almost of despair.

"You lie—you lie—" I exclaimed in a feeble voice. "Gontran is incapable of such infamy." Almost exhausted by this movement I fell back in my arm chair.

From that moment I experienced a kind of strange hallucination; while M. Lugarto spoke I fancied I saw his narrative acted before my eyes, the personages of his tale appeared in and disappeared from my sight as in a dream, and with the rapidity of thought.

"To convince you that I tell no lie in accusing de Lancry of being a forger," resumed M. Lugarto, shewing me a paper, "*here is the forged document itself.* I continue my narration. It will not last longer than the ten minutes more during which you will preserve your consciousness. Some days before, my banker had been informed by me, in confidence, and under the seal of the most profound secrecy, that de Lancry, abusing my friendship, might present two drafts forged with my name, but, out of consideration for the name the wretch bore, (this was what I said) I entreated my said banker to pay without making any noise; but only to preserve the draft, and to establish without doubt M. de Lancry's crime, reserving to myself the power of prosecuting him afterwards if no amendment manifested itself in the conduct of my unworthy friend. This was done, and witnesses, whose authority was unimpeachable, but whose discretion was sound, saw Lancry present the draft and pocket the money. Those witnesses and my banker signed the statement which I have here and in which I made all my reservations for the future. You see I have but a word to say to get your husband condemned for forgery, for it would be easy to obtain his delivery into the hands of the English authorities."

I hid my head in my hands with horror.

"This will explain to you the secret of my domination over de Lancry, and over many other people. I have a kind of police of my own, which I put upon the scent of those persons upon whom I have formed any designs, and the devil's in it if I do not discover some delicate peccadillo, or some sordid action which delivers them bound hand in foot into my power. You have seen a specimen of my performances, in my influence over the Princess de Ksernika, and the Duchess de Richeville. To return to Gontran, although the Jew was paid his thirty thousand francs, the marriage to the rich heiress did not take place. I withdrew the security I had given without any explanation. Lancry, summoned to prove his possession of the fortune, which he professed to enjoy, of course could not prove anything, the family naturally turned their backs upon him, and he found himself as poor as Job, with no property except more than some two hundred thousand francs which he owed to me. It cost

me a good deal, but as Satan would have said, his soul was now my property. When de Lancry saw himself thus in my power, he made a mighty fuss at first, but what could he do? resign himself for fear of the felon's brand. It was then that he received a letter from his uncle, proposing a marriage with you. I was delighted at this, my revenge would become a double one, and I should have the power of disposing of two existences instead of one. To ensure the success of this fine project which had been set on foot by Mademoiselle de Maran, and M. de Versac, I lent de Lancry a hundred thousand francs secured to me upon your dowry, in order that he might provide for any unforeseen expenses, and not be exposed to lose such an admirable chance. The marriage took place. I was ill in London, or I should have come to the wedding as bride's man. When I had recovered my health I wrote to Lancry who was enjoying his honey-moon at Chantilly. I ordered him to come to Paris immediately. Now what I *do* take into my head, I *will* accomplish. I gave your husband notice that I should pay my court to you, and he resigned himself though he made a wry face at it. However, he relied upon your virtue, and he was right—and so you have compelled me to have recourse to strong measures, as people say. You know all the rest—up to the scene at Tortoni's the other day. He was carried away by his temper, and being exasperated at *Madame's* contemptuous reception he shewed off with that insolent bravado at Tortoni's.

At two o'clock in the morning he was at my house, at my knees, crying his eyes out, and imploring me to have mercy upon him and upon you. He talked of nothing else but the galleys—I allowed myself to be touched once more, on these conditions: 1st. A duel was inevitable, and I was too *nervous* to think of a serious one. It was agreed then that we should be *supposed* to have fought with only soldiers for our seconds, I should also be *supposed* to have received a sword wound, but not a very dangerous one. I made it my business to confirm this report, which I accordingly did, and I am now looked upon as a *valiant hero*. 2ndly. Lancry was to set off immediately for London, where he is at this minute. Before his departure I compelled him to write at my dictation the first letter which you received at Paris, and which decided you to come here. The other letters, you must understand are my own, for your husband is not the only one who knows how to imitate handwriting, and to dabble in forgery.

I believe I have forgotten nothing—no. Now, that you still have a little consciousness remaining, look at the consequences of your situation well in the face; for the last two months the world has been persuaded that you and I are upon the best possible terms together—if any doubt of this existed, let people merely judge by the facts. You came here voluntarily, you wished to conceal this journey from your aunt, from M. de Versac, from Madame de

Ksarnika, since you wrote them word that you were going to see Madame Sécherin, in the country ; it is believed that your husband has wounded me in a duel, and it will naturally be concluded that as he was gone, you hurried here to console me in my sufferings ; how will you deny it ? where will be your proofs ? My false letters, you will say, but presently when you are completely asleep I shall take those letters from you and burn them.

Will you invoke the testimony of your servants ? In the first place they are creatures of my own, and then, they will say, what is true, that they acted by your instructions, for you alone ordered the departure. This is not all, to make it still more horrible—one of your relations, a respectable man, having no doubt of your infamous conduct, set off in your pursuit to prevent your ruin. Your passion blinded you to such a degree, that in concert with your lacquey you make this virtuous pursuer fall into an abominable trap, where perhaps he has lost his life. Well, what do you say to this ? I defy the most clever advocate to contradict all this, to prevent you from being crushed by appearances, and by this last and most transcendent scandal, for I have arranged matters so that it will be well known that you have not been to Madame Sécherin's at all, and that you came here to make me your tender and melancholy adieux. To-morrow morning (your sleep will last at least eight or ten hours), I shall set off for Italy, I shall allow you to awake at your leisure, and to write to Gontran at the Post-office, in London, to come back and console you if it amuses him. I shall, however, take with me this precious forgery—this infernal string at the end of which I shall always hold Gontran's soul and yours. As to the hundred thousand *écus* or thereabouts which your husband owes me—and of which I have the acknowledgments here—you will find them to-morrow morning, after my departure, torn in pieces at your feet, for I am as generous as gallant."

This last outrage revived the little strength and courage which I had still remaining.

M. Lugarto got up, looked at the clock, and said to me. "In ten minutes you will be mine."

As I made a despairing effort to lift myself from the arm chair in which I was falling into a lethargy, my eyes fell upon a knife.

I can now scarcely remember the violent thoughts which agitated me at that moment ; whether I wished to escape from dishonour by death, or whether I believed that pain and perhaps the loss of blood would snatch me from the frightful state in which I was plunged, I know not, but seizing the knife, I collected all my energy to stab myself with it in the breast ; the blade however slipped, and inflicted a slight wound on my shoulder. This movement was so rapid that M. Lugarto did not perceive it.

A well known voice exclaimed with terror—"Stop, Matilda !"

I raised myself upright by an almost convulsive movement, and made a step or two forward, extending my arms towards M. de Mortagne, for it was he.

He rushed towards me from an adjoining apartment.

M. de Rochegune, who accompanied him, seized M. Lugarto by the collar, with one hand, and double locked the door by which my two preservers had entered.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE PUNISHMENT.

I FELT such a revulsion of feeling at the sight of M. de Mortagne and M. de Rochegune, that I perfectly recovered my consciousness. Perhaps, too the slight wound which I had inflicted upon myself, had the salutary effect which a bleeding would have produced, for I felt nearly restored to my usual and natural state. While M. de Mortagne was dressing the wound, M. de Rochegune took possession of M. Lugarto's papers, who had become livid with terror. I then for the first time perceived that M. de Mortagne's face was cut and bruised in several places, and that his clothes, like M. de Rochegune's, were covered with mud. In my first emotion I had not reflected upon the providential nature of this assistance. When I had grown calmer I thanked God for my preservation. I was a silent witness of the scene that followed, but it is fixed in ineffable characters upon my memory. While that scene lasted, though M. de Rochegune was more a spectator of, than an actor in it; his swarthy and contracted features had perhaps a more menacing, a more terrible expression, than M. de Mortagne's fury. Whenever M. de Rochegune fixed his eyes upon M. Lugarto, they seemed on fire, and I observed several times by the nervous twitching of his hands, it was only by means of violent efforts, that he maintained an apparent calmness. Whenever his grey and piercing eyes met M. Lugarto's the latter seemed almost a prey to some painful fascination. After having attended to me, and placed me in an arm chair, M. de Mortagne said to me.

"You shall now, my poor girl, assist at the judgment and execution of this monster," and he turned towards M. Lugarto.

"But sir, what do you intend to do? you will not abuse your force," exclaimed the latter, stretching out his hands imploringly.

"Down on your knees, first of all, down on your knees," said M. de Mortagne to him in a terrible voice, and with his powerful hand he took M. Lugarto by the collar, and forced him rudely down upon his knees on the floor.

"But this is down right murder—an abuse of—"

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed M. de Mortagne.

"But—"

"Another word, and I will gag you."

M. Lugarto, completely overcome, let his head fall upon his breast.

"Now listen to me," said M. de Mortagne. "You shall write to M. de Lancry that you send him back the forged draft which might be his destruction. My purposes require that he should believe you to be acting voluntarily in restoring this paper to him, and that no one has been in your horrible confidence. Do you hear?"

M. Lugarto's features which had changed for a moment, resumed by degrees their expression of audacity. Still kneeling, he cast an oblique glance at M. de Mortagne and replied to him,

"You take me for a child, sir, you may wrest those papers from me by force, but I defy you to force me to write what you choose—"

"You will not write?"

"No."

"You will not?"

"Once more I tell you I will not."

M. de Mortagne was silent for a moment, looked round him, and then suddenly said,

"Roche-gune, give me the cord of that window curtain—is it strong?"

"Perfectly strong," replied M. de Roche-gune, taking a tolerably long silken cord from one of the curtains.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed M. Lugarto, half rising as he spoke.

M. de Mortagne forced him back upon his knees.

"I am going to tie this cord round your forehead, and then by means of a tourniquit (the handle of this knife will be just the thing), I shall keep tightening it more and more till you yield. It is an excellent kind of torture which I have seen practised in India with marvellous effect. The most obstinate resolutions are soon brought to reason by this proceeding."

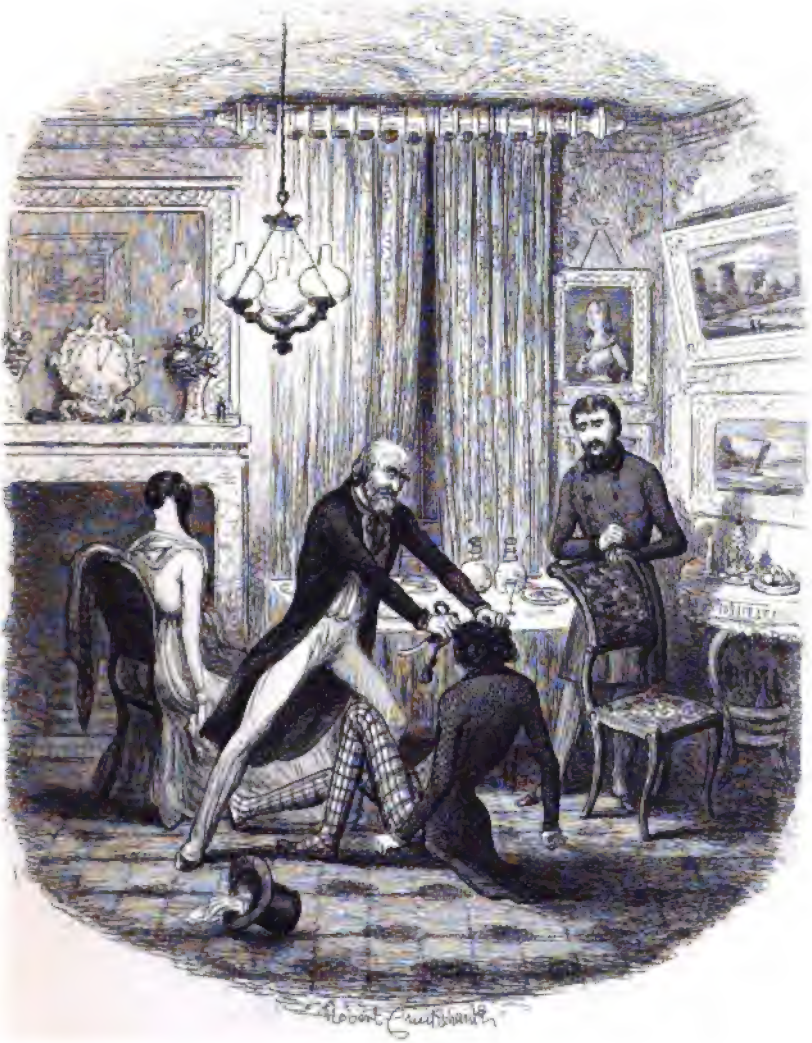
"You will not do that!" exclaimed M. Lugarto. "You will not do that! Justice—the law—"

"I will take upon myself to settle with justice and the law, the important point is that you should write," said M. de Mortagne with fearful coolness, and making a running knot in the cord.

"But I will not let myself be tortured—but—"

"Look at me,—look at M. de Roche-gune—then look at your own feeble person, and judge if you can resist us."

"But—"



The Purge



"Oh! let's have no more of this—Rochegune, take hold of his hands."

M. Lugarto's countenance became hideous with rage and terror. I covered my eyes with my handkerchief, a brief struggle took place, after which I heard a piercing shriek, and then these words in a trembling voice."

"Mercy! mercy! I will write—"

"Write then," said M. de Mortagne.

"You are abusing your power—you are two against one," murmured M. Lugarto.

"Will you write or not?"

M. Lugarto resigned himself and wrote the following lines, dictated by M. de Mortagne.

"I have carried on too long the foolish joke you know of, my dear Lancry, I return you the paper in question, and let the whole business be henceforth a secret between you and me, for I am heartily ashamed of all this. I am about to set off for Italy. Adieu, yours ever."

M. Lugarto signed his name after he had written.

"I hope this is all," he added, "I yield to violence. But patience—patience—"

"Hold your tongue," said M. de Mortagne. "How much does M. de Lancry owe you?"

"The securities given by M. de Lancry are in this pocket book," said M. Lugarto, "they amount to three hundred and twenty thousand francs."

M. de Mortagne wrote a few lines upon a piece of paper and gave them to M. Lugarto, saying to him—"Here is a draft for the amount upon my banker, payable at sight. You will direct your agent to present it."

He then tore up Gontran's bills.

"But this is scandalous—but this is a subtraction of documents—but—"

"And that unfortunate forgery of Gontran's?" said M. de Mortagne, without replying to him.

"Here it is," said M. de Rochegune.

M. de Mortagne put it with the letter which M. Lugarto had just written to M. de Lancry, and placed them both in his pocket book.

When he thus saw himself violently deprived of the means by which he could have continued to torture his victim, M. Lugarto uttered a cry of almost savage fury.

"It is infamous! it is compulsion—assassination—violence!"

"You are determined then to make me gag you?" exclaimed M. de Mortagne. "I forbid you to speak when I am not asking you a question. Now write again—"

"But—"

"Rochegune, give me the cord."

M. Lugarto cast a glance towards heaven and obeyed.

"M. de Mortagne dictated what follows, to M. Lugarto.

"I declare that I wrote some false letters to Madame la Vicomtesse de Lancry, and counterfeited the hand writing of her husband. In these letters M. de Lancry requested his wife to come instantly to him at a house situated near Chantilly, Madame de Lancry falling into this infamous snare, set out immediately from Paris: on her arrival here she found another pretended letter from M. de Lancry, which had similarly been forged by me, requesting his wife to feel no uneasiness, but to wait for him here, and announcing that he should return next day. Madame de Lancry, worn out with fatigue, accepted the supper which I had caused to be prepared for her—I had put a narcotic drug into everything that was served upon her table. When the poison began to operate, I presented myself before Madame de Lancry, and had the barbarity to tell her that she had taken a narcotic, and to point out to her every minute the increasing effect of the opiate, declaring to Madame de Lancry that at midnight she would be completely asleep and then entirely in my power. At this horrible threat, Madame de Lancry preferring death to dishonor, and collecting all the strength and consciousness which she still possessed, seized a knife and wounded herself with it. M. de Mortagne and M. de Rochegune, who had contrived to introduce themselves into the house and who had been concealed witnesses of all this scene, entered the apartment at that moment, and as I am as cowardly as cruel!"

"I will not write that!" exclaimed M. Lugarto, throwing down the pen.

M. de Mortagne gave M. Lugarto a violent blow on the face with the back of his hand. The latter attempted to get up.

M. de Mortagne kept him down on his chair and said to him,

"I will prove to yourself—what, by the way, you are perfectly well aware of—that you are a miserable coward. I have struck you, and I therefore owe you satisfaction. Here are two loaded pistols, it is a beautiful moonlight night, and Rochegune will be our witness—Come."

And seizing M. Lugarto by the collar he took a step towards the door, while M. de Rochegune took up the pistols, which on his entrance he had placed upon the table.

M. Lugarto foamed at the mouth with rage, and appeared to be suffering under a violent struggle.

"Come along," said M. de Mortagne, attempting to drag him away, "come along, I have an idea that I shall kill you—for God is just—come along, do you hear?"

M. Lugarto got up, and took one step, but fear prevailed over his desire to revenge himself for the insult which he had received, he fell back overcome upon his chair, saying to M. de Mortagne in a broken voice.

"You are a consummate duellist—you want to assassinate me—I—"

"Write then this instant—that you are a coward, or I will break every bone in your skin!" exclaimed M. de Mortagne in a terrible voice.

M. Lugarto bent his head, took up the pen, and continued to write.

"As I am as cowardly as cruel—"

"Begin a parenthesis," added M. de Mortagne.

"(And so cowardly that after having received just now a blow in the face from M. de Mortagne—"

"Will you write or not?"

M. Lugarto again hesitated, but at last made up his mind.

"That after having received a blow in the face from M. de Mortagne, I had not courage enough to accept the duel which he offered me.)"

"Close the parenthesis."

"I have declared and confessed the infamies which I have just written, trembling with fear all the time. I declare also that I made M. de Rohegune the victim of a murderous stratagem, of which Fritz Muller, a man in my pay, was the instrument, as will appear from the legal proceedings about to be taken by M. de Rohegune—"

"But," said M. Lugarto, interrupting himself again, "since I consent to everything, spare—"

"Will you hold your tongue or not? Write."

"Drawn up, signed, and declared true under the influence of that terror which cowards like me always feel in the presence of men of honour and courage,

Lugarto."

After he had signed his name, M. Lugarto threw down his pen and hid his face in his hands.

"Now listen," continued M. de Mortagne, "to-morrow morning you will set off for Italy, and I forbid you, do you hear what I say? I forbid you to set foot in France again unless I authorize you to do so—I banish you."

"This is madness!" exclaimed M. Lugarto. "After all I defy your menaces, the law will protect me, and I shall remain in France if I choose."

"Listen to me—" exclaimed M. de Mortagne, raising himself to the full height of his lofty and robust figure; while he placed his

hand upon M. Lugarto's shoulder, who was almost compelled to stoop under that powerful grasp.

"Listen to me, I say. For four months you have been the evil genius of the most adorable woman that exists upon earth. You have done every thing in the world to destroy her reputation, and to degrade her husband ; you have employed the most execrable perfidy for the purpose of giving plausibility to your infamous calumnies. You have attempted to assassinate M. de Rochegune : you have committed forgery in order to allure madame de Lancry hither. You and your accomplices have been also a second time murderers in intention, by the horrible stratagem through which my life was endangered : you have been a poisoner by making that unhappy woman take a beverage intended to enable you to commit another crime in addition to so many villainies. This is what you have done—do you hear ? do you hear ?"

The look, the voice, the accent of M. de Mortagne were so menacing that M. Lugarto, in spite of his audacity, did not dare to reply a word.

M. de Mortagne added with still increasing excitement, and directing M. Lugarto's attention to me.

"You do not know then that I promised her mother, upon her death-bed, to watch over Matilda as if she were my own child. You do not know then how dangerous it is to attack those whom I love ? You do not know then that had it not been for the interest I had in discovering the motive of the fatal influence which you exercised over M. de Lancry, I would have kicked you out of France long ere this ? for you must be well aware that a man like myself who is determined to hunt down a scoundrel like you, succeeds at last in delivering society of such a pest, and that no fear of the laws will check him ! And besides," exclaimed M. de Mortagne, losing all self-control, "are you not beyond the pale of the law ? I am only too good not to kill you here like a dog ! Have I not the right to do it ?"

"The right ?" exclaimed M. Lugarto terrified at M. de Mortagne's violence.

"Yes the right—yes—I have a right to kill you—here—this instant. Matilda is related to me, you allure her to this place by means of forged letters—you poison her, I possess the proof of it—you are about to commit an execrable crime, when I, her friend, her relation, arrive—I surprise you—I take this pistol, I put it to your head," and M. de Mortagne, while he spoke, held a pistol to M. Lugarto's forehead, "and I blow your brains out. Well then ! and when I have done it, who will blame me ? what court of justice will dare to condemn me ? Have you not been caught in the very act ? does not your life belong to me, eh, scoundrel ?"

Terrified at M. de Mortagne's fury, who, becoming more and

more excited, had lost all self-possession, and still held the cocked pistol to M. Lugarto's forehead, the latter clasped his hands with horror, his countenance became fearfully convulsed, and he had only the strength to say—

"Mercy—mercy—good God! take care!—the pistol is loaded."

And he let his two arms fall down his sides as if he had lost all sensation.

M. de Rochegune himself, frightened at M. de Mortagne's exasperation, said to him.

"Have compassion upon the wretch."

"Did he—he—have pity upon that poor girl?" thundered M. de Mortagne.

"Mercy—my God! I will leave France whenever you choose—I swear to you, I will," murmured M. Lugarto in a low voice.

"Do you dare to take an oath here? I do not rely upon your word, but upon my own, and I pledge that word to you, do you hear? my word as a man of honour, that you shall not set foot in France again, and for an excellent reason which you will soon understand. As, after all, you must be punished for your infamies, and it does not suit me to have recourse to the law; as, after all, you are a forger, a murderer, a poisoner, and that wretches like you are branded with a hot iron, I too, I myself will brand you, do you hear? and brand you not on the shoulder, but on the forehead—I will brand you with a T and an F so that you may be easily recognized anywhere! That will prevent your wishing to return to France, I flatter myself!"

"Oh! this man is a fiend!" exclaimed M. Lugarto, clasping his hands with terror and half rising from his seat. "Good God! good God! what more do you wish to do to me? Have you not insulted me, humiliated me enough?"

"I will brand you on the forehead. The blade of this knife, when I have made it red hot in the flame of that candle, will suffice to make a mark that cannot be effaced."

As he spoke thus, M. de Mortagne took the knife with which I had wounded myself, and put it close to one of the lights, M. Lugarto gazed at him with terror, and ran to the door.

It was locked.

He then came back, threw himself at my feet and exclaimed in a voice of fearful agony,

"Oh! not that—not that—madame—have pity upon me. I have outraged you—I have been a coward—an infamous one—I will go away—I will go away—I will never come back. But not that—Oh! in mercy, not that!"

The man's features were completely distorted by terror, he wept and stretched out his hands to M. de Mortagne.

M. de Mortagne, without the slightest emotion, continued to heat the blade of the knife in the candle.

"But *you*, sir, *you* will be less implacable!" exclaimed M. Lugarto addressing M. de Rohegune. "I caused you to be treacherously attacked, I confess it. I repent it now—have pity upon me, pray for me. But, in the name of heaven, not that. For life! do but think—branded for life—upon the face. Ah! it is horrible! it is an infernal idea!"

M. de Rohegune shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"But *you*, madame, *you—you—* oh! my God! by the memory of your mother whom you so loved, madame, pray for me!"

In spite of myself, in spite of the horrible evil that man had inflicted upon me, I recoiled from such a barbarous punishment.

"My friend, my saviour," I said to M. de Mortagne, "leave him to his remorse, only let him go away, let him go away."

"His remorse!" said M. de Mortagne, "do scoundrels like him ever feel remorse! The only remorse he is capable of feeling will be his rage at having the brand of a hot iron on his forehead. Come, Rohegune, the knife is red hot—tie his hands."

"For pity's sake, let him go!" I exclaimed. "I will not assist at such a scene of terrible torture. My friend, I implore you, such a revenge is unworthy of you and myself."

After having looked at M. Lugarto for a moment, who was sobbing and still murmuring prayers and supplications, M. de Mortagne said to him.

"Thanks to that angel of goodness, once again I take compassion upon you."

"Oh! your hand—your hand, let me kiss your hand!" exclaimed M. Lugarto with a burst of inexpressible gratitude, and dragging himself upon his knees towards M. de Mortagne.

The latter hastily drew back, pushed him away with his foot and said to him.

"But I swear to you that if you dare to return into France, I will do then what I do not now. You ought to know me well enough to believe that I will recoil from nothing: two determined men besides myself will suffice for the execution, and I shall easily find a way to get you into my power."

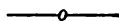
"I promise you, I will never return to France, everything is ready for my departure, my carriage will be here to-morrow, at the dawn of day I will depart for Italy. I will travel day and night till I am out of France, I swear to you I will," said M. Lugarto, whose teeth were chattering with terror.

"Matilda, my child, you require repose," said M. de Mortagne to me. "Your maid is there, you have nothing more to fear. Come, Rohegune will remain with that wretch. To-morrow when

you have enjoyed a night's repose, I will tell you how we discovered that man's evil design."

I followed M. de Mortagne's advice, and retired into the apartment which had been prepared for me.

I soon fell into a profound sleep.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE FAREWELL.

THE next morning when I awoke, I fancied that I had been dreaming, but the acute pain caused by my wound, brought back to my recollection the terrible scene of the preceding night.

My first impulse was again to thank God who had preserved me, and who had restored Gontran to me. The odious mysteries which had so long afflicted me, were now cleared up, and I felt no doubt that henceforth my husband being tranquil and re-assured would become once more what he had been to me in the first days of our union.

I attributed to the fatal influence of M. Lugarto all the pain which Gontran had involuntary inflicted upon me. Was it not in obedience to his evil genius that he had paid attentions to Madame de Keernika? At first, I confess that I feared to allow my thoughts to dwell upon the fatal act which had placed M. de Lancry in the power of M. Lugarto. And yet, becoming determined to put an end at once to those painful reflections, I courageously considered the conduct of Gontran. I endeavoured to palliate it by every possible argument. Alas! my principles were naturally too firm to leave me any middle course between severe blame and a culpable approbation—I condemned Gontran. For an instant I was thunder-struck at perceiving that this fatal discovery did not in the least impair my love for Gontran. I was almost terrified at still loving, so passionately, a man capable of so wicked an action. I wept bitterly over his fault; it was frightful for me to find myself superior to him, and to have not reproaches but forgiveness to give him, for a base deed. This feeling became so acute so painful, that with a strange inconsistency almost inexplicable to me now, I who had been unable to find an honourable excuse for his disgraceful deed, did everything to persuade myself by several analogies, that in a similar situation I should have acted as Gontran had done. I cannot describe my joy when, after long and mature reflections one more paradoxical than another, I became convinced of this kind of moral complicity. With what triumphant delight I discovered that I had no longer the right to blame Gontran! Doubt-

less, in that singular self-abasement of mine, there was a secret thought of sacrifice and self-denial, of which, at that time, I had but little idea, and which directed me, unknown to myself.

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When I came down stairs into the drawing-room, I found M. de Rochegune there, he blushed, and told me that M. de Mortagne was giving some directions concerning my departure.

"I was yesterday so troubled, and so unwell," I said to him, "that I was hardly able to express all my gratitude to you. You and M. de Mortagne have been my preservers. Nor do I forget that during my illness—"

"I implore you, madame, do not let us talk of this. You permitted me to call myself your friend, and I have acted in that character."

"Ah! sir, how can I ever repay you?"

"By always allowing me to retain that precious title, madame, by always allowing me to continue deserving it."

I know not why the painful idea suddenly occurred to me that M. de Rochegune, being acquainted with Gontran's secret, would perhaps believe himself justified in judging the conduct of my husband with severity.

By one of those strange coincidences of thought of which there are so many instances, M. de Rochegune added, at that very moment. "And when I entreat you, madame, to allow me to call myself your friend, I am bold enough to believe that you will not forget, I shall be happy always to be considered one of *M. de Lancry's friends also*."

I remarked that M. de Rochegune laid an intentional emphasis upon these last words. I thought this assurance so generous, it was such a noble answer to my fears, that I could not help hastily exclaiming.

"Oh! thank you, sir; thank you for him and for myself!"

M. de Rochegune, astonished at this emotion, looked at me. We understood each other.

He understood my gratitude, as I had understood his kindness with respect to Gontran.

A sweet and melancholy smile played round M. de Rochegune's mouth, and he said to me in a voice of emotion.

"There are noble pleasures in life, madame, and it is too easy to do good for such rewards."

We were both silent for a few minutes after these words of M. de Rochegune.

I became embarrassed, by chance I looked up at him; his glance was vague and wandering, and he seemed plunged in meditation.

His countenance, usually so severe and haughty, had now an expression of indescribable kindness. His black hair scarcely covered a fresh and deep scar which was upon his forehead, and which I had already remarked when he came to see me for the first time, after my illness. In spite of myself my eyes were filled with tears when I reflected that I had been the involuntary cause of the murderous ambush into which M. de Rochegune had fallen, when he came to enquire after my health from Blondeau. Wishing to break the silence, I said to him.

"You do not suffer now—from the wound which you received?"

When he heard my voice, M. de Rochegune started and hastened to reply.

"I do not, madame." Then as if this subject annoyed him, he said to me in a tone of much feeling.

"All I fear now, is lest that wretch Lugarto, although absent from France, should revenge himself upon M. de Mortagne."

"How?"

"This morning that man departed, M. de Mortagne saw him into his carriage, and gave him a final warning—'Remember!' he said to him with a menacing gesture.—'I will remember too well for your peace!' replied M. Lugarto, 'at whatever distance I may be—I will contrive to reach you.' And after shaking his fist at M. de Mortagne he ordered the postillions to set off at full speed. Oh! madame, it is impossible to conceive anything more hideous than the countenance of that man, as he uttered this last threat; its expression was a convulsive medley of hatred, revenge, terror and fury."

"Great God!" I exclaimed, "he is capable, even in a foreign country, of setting on foot some treacherous machination against M. de Mortagne, that monster has so many resources in his wealth by which he can gratify his infernal malice!"

"I share your fears," said M. de Rochegune to me, "and, unfortunately, I am compelled to leave M. de Mortagne. Otherwise, I would have watched over his life as I would over a father's."

"And whither then are you going, sir?"

"Into Greece, madame, to serve against the Turks. It is a noble and holy cause to defend. And then I require excitement—agitation."

"It is a war, they say, which is often a terrible one, a war of extermination and without quarter," I said to M. de Rochegune, earnestly.

"It is a war like all wars, madame," he replied with a melancholy smile, "one either kills or is killed. Only in such a war as that, one dies for a generous and heroic nation—and such a death is a glorious and honourable one."

"Those are mournful presentiments," I said, "do not dwell

upon them. As for me, I have a hope and even a conviction that your friends will see you again."

"And I share that conviction, madame. One has no right to be indifferent to life, when one has the least chance of being able to serve those whom one loves and respects."

M. de Mortagne now entered the room. He appeared very much irritated.

"I have just learned a fresh infamy of that Lugarto's. Your maid, whom I have been urging with questions and menaces, has confessed to me that she was introduced into your service by that man, and that in order to prevent your excellent Madame Blondeau from accompanying you, she, like a vile creature as she is, had, in compliance with Lugarto's orders, mixed a certain powder in her drink, which had rendered Blondeau so ill that she was unable to accompany you."

"My friend, M. de Rochegune, has told me, that M. Lugarto on his departure—"

"Yes, yes, he menaced me. I expect some infernal trick from him, but I will be on my guard. All that I wanted was to deliver you from him, and I think I have succeeded in that. Nevertheless, I am sorry that I did not brand him—it would have been an additional security."

"And also an additional motive for that man's hatred and revenge," I said to him.

"If one were restrained by such fears as those, one should never do anything," said M. de Mortagne. "I know very well against whom I have to contend. But I must tell you how I followed the trace of this abominable machination. Some time after your return from Chantilly, I heard, through Rochegune, the infamous reports which Lugarto was circulating respecting you: at that time I was ill and unable to go out. Rochegune's first impulse was to go to Lugarto and to command him to hold his tongue, he knew him of old, was aware that he was a thorough coward, and did not doubt that a vigorous menace would intimidate him; I persuaded him to do nothing of the kind—I had written to London to obtain information as to the life which M. de Lancry had led there previously to his marriage."

Seeing that the conversation was about to turn upon M. de Lancry, M. de Rochegune, with a feeling of exquisite delicacy which I fully appreciated, said to M. de Mortagne.

"I have some directions to give about our departure, I will therefore leave you."

He bowed to me, and then left the room.

M. de Mortagne continued—

"I was informed that in London M. de Lancry had spent a great deal of money, and that according to public report that money had

been lent to him by Lugarto. This, joined to other circumstances, convinced me that your husband was in the power of that man, not that I believed, however, that power to have been rendered still more despotic and dangerous by the document which you are aware of. I therefore persuaded Rohegune to take patience and to wait till I was recovered. A confidential man of mine who has been in my service for twenty years, got into conversation with some of Lugarto's domestics. I learnt through them that they had often heard M. de Lancry, when closeted with their master, implore Lugarto not to ruin him. This information satisfied me that there was something else in the wind besides a mere pecuniary obligation, and I determined to discover this secret, at whatever cost and to protect you from the evil designs of Lugarto. He knew my affection for you.

"I soon perceived that I was watched, for that man, by dint of money, has established a sort of police for himself, by means of which he discovers a number of secrets that he employs and abuses as opportunity offers; this you have seen in the instances of Madame de Ksernika and Madame de Richeville. In order to put his suspicions on a wrong scent, I left Paris, and his spies lost all trace of me: this was about the time of your illness. A few days afterwards I returned to Paris, and settled myself in an out of the way quarter of the town, this, however, did not prevent me from watching Lugarto's proceedings, and I knew, as well as he did, that needy rascals are always to be bribed. Now as almost all his servants have been his accomplices in some of his wicked or disgraceful actions, I was enabled to purchase some of them, and I thus learned that some time ago he had hired and purchased an isolated house in the direction of Chantilly. It is this very house—I came here to satisfy myself as to the fact, and to reconnoitre the situation of the place. I was aware that Lugarto counterfeited hand writing with detestable adroitness. Dreading some stratagem I sent you directions by Rohegune never to leave your husband, taking for granted that Lugarto would choose the period of his absence in order to play you some infernal trick. The scene at Torton's took place—I only heard of it next day through Rohegune. I sent to your house, and was told that you had just set off for Ursula's, and that M. de Lancry was also absent. I sent to Lugarto's, who, according to the servant's account, was laid up in bed with a sword wound received that very morning. Knowing the character of the man, I did not believe in this sword wound, and above all I was struck at your separation from Gontran; an hour's delay or hesitation might ruin everything—if you had really gone to Madame Sécherin's you were in no danger, we had no need therefore to let our thoughts dwell upon *that* hypothesis; and we determined to come here at all hazards. We were on the point of

overtaking you at the declivity of Luzarches, when that devil of a man contrived to upset us over a heap of pavement, the crash was terrible, for some minutes I was insensible—”

“ My friend ! good God ! so many perils already incurred, and for me always for me ! ”

“ Those perils are reckoned for nothing, my poor girl, except when they make me arrive too late. This time, thank heaven, it was not the case. After a few moments of insensibility I recovered. I and Rochegune had both got off with a few severish bruises. But our horses could not stir a step, our postillion had a leg broken, and my carriage was dashed to pieces. We counted every second ; it would take us more than an hour to walk here, we set off—Fortunately, after a quarter of an hour’s walk, we met the post horses returning, which had brought you here. From the details given to us by the postillions there was no doubt that it was you. I and Rochegune took the two saddled horses, and we set off at full speed, in half an hour we were within a few steps of the house. In order not to arouse any suspicions we left our horses a little way off. All the windows were closed, but we could see a light through the blinds. We had just made up our minds to knock violently at the door, when a window on the ground floor was opened, it was your maid, who doubtless wanted some air. We saw too an old woman and Fritz, sitting in a low parlour, with one leap we were in the room, with pistols in our hands. Rochegune placed himself at the door, and I took my station at the window. The wretches fell upon their knees overcome with terror.

“ ‘ There must be a wood house, or a cellar, somewhere,’ I said to them, ‘ shew us the way there or we will blow your brains out.’ ”

“ ‘ To your right, beneath the vestibule is the cellar door,’ said the old woman to me.

“ Five minutes afterwards, Fritz and the two women were shut up. We entered the room which opens into the apartment in which you were, we heard voices, it was Lugarto who was telling you all his horrible machinations. These revelations might be of service to us, so we waited till the instant when you, my poor girl, so courageously wounded yourself.”

“ Noble and generous friend,” I said to M. de Mortagne, pressing his hands in mine, “ always—always there, when I am to be assisted or preserved ? ”

“ Yes ! doubtless, always there. Without you what interest should I have in life ? But, my child, you must put this letter to your husband into the post this very day : he will find it on his arrival in London, it will convey to him that unfortunate forgery of his, and restore him to freedom. To defeat the malicious rumours set about by Lugarto, and to explain your departure from Paris, so that your husband may have no suspicion of what has happened to-night, you

must immediately set off for Madame Sécherin's country place. Once there you must write word to your husband—that as you were unwilling to remain at Paris without him, you had gone to spend the period of his absence at Ursula's. You must address your letter to your own house at Paris, and then he will find it on his arrival."

"But, my friend, why not tell everything to Gontran?"

"Why? my poor girl! because from the moment when your husband knows that you are acquainted with the disgraceful action which he has committed, he will hate you—he will be forced to blush in your presence—and he will never forgive you for *his own fault*."

"Ah! can you believe?"

"Listen, Matilda, I wish to use no reproaches—I only wish to see in M. de Lancry the man whom you love: your noble and holy affection is his safe-guard in my eyes: but still be just; when he knew that you were miserable at his hideous intimacy with a man whom he despised, whom he detested as much as you did, had he the courage to make this fatal confession to you? No! he preferred that the most infamous reports should be circulated and acquire credit respecting you."

"But it would have been ruin to him, to have broken off openly with M. Lugarto!"

"But it would have preserved your reputation, my poor girl, who were innocent of all the vile charges brought against you. If your husband had not been so abominably selfish, he would have braved courageously the consequences of his fault, instead of suffering you to be disgraced in the eyes of the world. After that scene at Tortoni's, which revealed at least one impulse of generous indignation on his part, did he not once more give way to all that was exacted from him by Lugarto? Did he not, if I may use the expression, abandon you to that most cowardly man's infamous attempts? Believe, me, Matilda, my poor, my beloved child, it requires all the respect, all the admiration with which your devotion inspires me, to hinder me from saying what I think. I do not wish to sadden you still more. Only, believe my experience, and never tell Gontran that you are in possession of his secret. That avowal would be fatal to you—I repeat it again, the man, who in the terrible circumstances in which you were placed, had not sufficient confidence in your heart, to confess everything to you, would be implacable, if he knew that you were acquainted with a mystery which he has so obstinately concealed."

"But, after all, if Gontran should by chance discover that I have been in this house?"

"I have thought of that—I have thought also that Lugarto, with some fresh idea of malice of which I cannot yet perceive the

purpose, might write an account of the whole business to your husband, but in such a case this declaration with his signature, my testimony and that of Rohegune would suffice to put you out of reach of all calumny, for we must be prepared for everything."

"I will follow your advice," I said to M. de Mortagne with a sigh. "And yet, I confess, it hurts me to conceal anything from Gontran."

M. de Mortagne, without replying, took my two hands, and looked at me for some minutes in silence.

His strongly marked features wore an expression of indescribable emotion. In spite of himself he shed tears—I cannot tell how deeply touched I felt, at seeing those tears fall from a man of such energy and resolution.

"Good God! what is the matter, my friend?" I exclaimed, unable to restrain my own tears.

"I cannot yet foresee that happiness will be your lot for the future. Poor girl, your husband is delivered from a fearful tyranny, your fortune is re-established. M. de Lancry is cruelly in need of your forgiveness, and repentance ought to render still better those hearts which are naturally good. And yet I fear—I am not reassured."

"These are vain terrors, my friend, your affection for me alarms itself without reason, believe me."

"Alas! I hope I am mistaken," said M. de Mortagne with a melancholy shake of the head.

"By the bye," I said, "it is an understood thing, is it not, that we are to repay you the considerable sum of money which you have laid out for us?"

"Listen, Matilda, I have an income of nearly sixty thousand *livres*. During the years which, thanks to Mademoiselle de Maran, I spent in the dungeons of Venice, I was forced to lay by considerable sums, I have but few wants, I employ nearly all my income in relieving obscure and unpretending misfortune, you will inherit all I have, and therefore this money is merely a sum paid in advance."

"Yet, my friend—"

"Listen to me again—your marriage contract was so dishonourably drawn up, that you who brought all the money to the common stock, have not a farthing settled to your own use, your husband has it in his power to plunder and ruin you completely. Luckily I am here, and my fortune is your security for the future."

"Fear not, my friend, I assure you that Gontran has quite given up all his expensive pursuits—he does not gamble any more."

"The establishment you keep at Paris, was from the first much too considerable for your fortune, and I am sure that M. de Lancry when he sees himself delivered from Lugarto will again launch out

into all kinds of extravagance. You have still four hundred thousand francs clear income, after the expenses of your hôtel are paid ; well, in five or six years from this time, your husband may have squandered everything—I know what prodigals are.”

“ But, my friend—”

“ But, my poor girl, he was not deterred or restrained by the disgrace of committing a forgery, in order to obtain money. What then will there be to check him, when he will be able to make ducks and drakes of your fortune ? Forgive me, Matilda, I grieve you, I know—but there are some stern truths which must be told. I have never failed in my duty in that respect, and I never will. I implore you, resist the prodigalities of your husband, to the utmost of your power ; adopt this resolution for your sake and for his own. I will say nothing to him, I will reserve my influence for extreme cases. He is violent, passionate, and impatient of remonstrances—little, however, does that matter, when your interest requires me to speak out—I will speak, and so as to be heard, and listened to, I give you my word. Now then, farewell, my child. When the least thing happens write to me at Paris, and always depend upon me—and upon Rohegune. As for him, may God preserve him to me, for he is going to engage in a terrible war, and he is not a man to spare himself in it. Farewell, once more farewell ! I will send Blondeau to you at Madame Sécherin’s, one of my servants, who accompanied me yesterday, and who has just arrived with my carriage, will go with you, he has been in my service for a long time—this will convince you that he is to be trusted. Besides him you can take the maid that you brought with you, but discharge her as soon as Blondeau arrives, and on your return to Paris, make a clear house, lest some dangerous creature of Lugarto’s should remain among your servants, and do not renew your establishment, except with domestics who come to you with the best recommendations. Come, once more, farewell.”

For the last time, I again embraced that excellent friend, gently weeping as I did so. I pressed M. de Rohegune’s hands affectionately, and I then set off for Touraine, looking forward with delight to surprise Ursula by my unexpected visit.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE SECHERIN FAMILY.

THE estate which M. Sécherin at that time inhabited with Ursula, was situated at Rouvray in Touraine, on the borders of the Loire.

I was obliged to pass through Paris on my way there, and I stopped in that city in order to put into the post, with my own hands, M. Lugarto's letter to Gontran, that letter which was to transport my husband with joy, and to deliver him from the odious influence to which he had so long been subjected. It was now the end of June. I travelled with great speed, and the farther I got from Paris the more freely I seemed to breathe : the sight of the cheerful country scenes through which I passed, calmed me, and did me good ; my heart expanded—I was about to see, once more, the dear friend of my childhood. After so many cruel emotions I was about to taste the peaceful repose of the country, and I looked forward with delight to share for some time the peaceful existence of Ursula and her husband. It was long since I had heard from my cousin. In her last letters she continued to lament her lot, but she supported it with a melancholy resignation. I knew the exaltation of Ursula's disposition, and the kindness of her husband, so I did not feel much uneasiness on her account. I had not written to her one word about the troubles which had for some time disturbed my existence, and I was resolved not to confide anything of them to her, for the secret was not mine only but also that of Gontran. I arrived at Rouvray at sunset on a charming summer's evening. I passed on the left some large buildings, where was established the factory of M. Sécherin. A beautiful avenue of lime trees led to the house.

Scarcely had my carriage proceeded through half this avenue, when I perceived Ursula. The horses were stopped, the door opened, and I flung myself into my cousin's arms. It is impossible to describe her joy, and above all, her astonishment ; she embraced me, gazed at me as if she could not believe her own eyes, and then embraced me again.

"What ! is it you ? really you ?" she said. "What a delightful surprise !"

"Yes, Ursula, it is Matilda, your sister. I am come to spend a few days with you, while my husband is in England."

"What a charming idea that was of yours, Matilda ! and how grateful I feel to you for it ! It is only a pity that our poor house is so unworthy of receiving you."

I shrugged my shoulders with a smile.

"And your husband, where and how is he ?"

"Extremely well," replied Ursula.

After this excitement of our first meeting I looked at my cousin, and I thought her prettier than ever.

"You look so pretty that you must be happy," I said to her.

"Happy !" she replied in an accent of sudden melancholy—"happy ? yes—I am happy," and she stifled a sigh. "But it is to you that I must talk of happiness !"

"Oh yes !" I exclaimed, "especially at this instant, you cannot

tell how delighted I am at seeing you once more, you cannot tell how much I anticipate from the days I am going to spend with you."

I took Ursula's arm, and we proceeded towards the house. The building was of tolerable dimensions, and surrounded by a garden laid out in squares, and quincunxes, and bordered by alleys of elm trees cut out with all the regularity of the old French fashion, giving a calm and somewhat solemn aspect to the place—at the end of one of these extensive arches of verdure which came out upon a terrace, a view of the Loire was obtained.

"You think this place very provincial, and vulgar, do you not?" said Ursula to me, "but M. Sécherin, or rather his mother, will not allow the slightest change to be made, under the pretence of its all having been just as it is now, in the time of M. Sécherin's late father, which does not prevent the place being frightful as you may perceive. And that dreadful French garden, would you not think it was a convent garden? how melancholy and gloomy it is!"

"No—no—you are calumniating the place, my dear Ursula, I think the garden a very fine and noble looking one, and then you have—at least I think so—a terrace leading to the borders of the Loire, do you not reckon *that* something?"

"As indulgent and kind as ever, dear Matilda!"

"No, indeed, I assure you I am delighted with it all. It is so calm, so tranquil."

"Oh! God knows there is calmness enough, fortunately one does not hear the stunning noise of the machines in M. Sécherin's factory."

"That is where those great buildings are, which one sees as one approaches, is it not? Why it is a magnificent establishment."

"Magnificent! yes for a factory. There is not a more gloomy thing in the world—unless it be having this same factory's marvellous results, the number of workmen it employs, its importance in the country, etc. etc., dinned into one's ears from morning to night. You must resign yourself, my poor Matilda, to a constant endurance of such interesting topics. What a change for you who are accustomed to that brilliant existence in society, of which, alas! I caught but a glimpse before I came and buried myself here."

I gave Ursula a reproachful look.

"My sister—my sister," I said to her. "I am afraid I shall have to scold you again: I am sure you are calumniating your own happiness. Ah! believe me, that world—that world of which we used to form such brilliant ideas, that world is a very sad and wicked one. How much should I prefer to all its false pleasures the peaceable existence which you lead in this spot."

Ursula looked at me with surprise.

"You—you," she said "you envy me? you must indeed be miserable then, Matilda. What has happened to you? Have you then concealed anything from me?"

"No, my dear Ursula," I hastened to reply, "but, I assure you, the pleasures of the world only dazzle but do not fill the heart: you know, I was always a somewhat uncivilized being; even at Mademoiselle de Maran's, I preferred spending my evenings with you in our room, to remaining in the drawing room."

"How well I recognise your habitual kindness and delicacy," said Ursula to me, "you pretend to envy me in order to make me think my own lot a desirable one! But, come, let me shew you to your apartment. You must excuse our modest hospitality."

We entered the house.

Everything was simple but had a character of extreme neatness. We ascended a great square-tiled staircase (with massive wooden balustrades) which brought us out upon a long gallery, into which opened the doors of several apartments. Ursula opened one of these doors, I passed through a small ante-chamber and found myself in a very large room with antique grey wainscoting. At the farther end was a canopied bed with curtains of Persian cloth, representing red Chinese subjects upon a white ground. Over the doors and the chimney-piece were painted panels of pastoral scenes after Watteau. There were light green trees, a fine azure sky, shepherdesses in rose coloured petticoats, and shepherds in sky blue coats, at whose feet were lying snow white sheep with large rosettes of ribbands round their necks.

I cannot describe how delighted I was at the sight of these Arcadian scenes, which, though certainly somewhat affected and out of nature, were yet so smiling in their rustic tranquillity that they communicated a delicious feeling of repose to my mind. There were spacious windows, with small panes of glass, opening into the garden, and commanding views of the Loire. A set of drawers and a desk both inlaid with marqueterie, some other articles of furniture painted of a grey colour, and covered, like the curtains, with red and white Persian cloth, completed the contents of this apartment.

Ursula seemed ashamed of this simplicity which to me was enchanting, I could fancy nothing more gay, more cheerful. Two other rooms furnished with similar taste and of which one might be used as a little drawing room, were attached to the apartment.

"Then," said Ursula to me, "you can really put up with this room?"

"I like it so much that if M. de Lancry will stop here a few days when he comes to fetch me, I give you notice that you will have some trouble in getting rid of us."

"Well, well, I believe you, my good Matilda, all my fear is lest

you should soon grow weary of this existence which, I am certain, owes all its charms to your imagination. I fear too that you will soon find my mother-in-law, Madame Sécherin, insupportable."

"Why, your husband said she was the best woman in the world."

"Sons are always indulgent: you will see her. She has no intellect, no usage of the world, a bigot in religion and with an obstinacy of purpose which, had she as much intelligence as self-will, would be an incredible firmness of disposition; neither myself or her son have been able to induce her, to make the slightest alteration in this house, to change the number of servants, or to place their services upon a better footing. Her eternal tune is, '*My poor dear deceased Sécherin was quite satisfied with the way things went on.*' So you, Matilda, who possess, they say, one of the best and most elegant establishments in Paris," continued Ursula, colouring up with confusion, "must not be too severe in your ridicule of us, when you see us served at table by two coarse Touraine country girls; it is a fancy of my mother-in-law's, and nothing in the world can induce her to give it up."

I looked at my cousin without being able to conceal from her the pain I felt.

"Why surely, Ursula, you must know me very little if you can think me capable of even remarking such miserable trifles. Is not my first thought the pleasure of being with you?"

Seven o'clock now struck.

"I will send your maid to you, directly," said Ursula to me, "Madame Sécherin sups punctually at eight. Yes, sups, for nothing can persuade her to change her gothic customs, and she would have the rudeness to sit down without you, if you did not happen to be ready."

"And I should much regret it, my good Ursula, for your mother-in-law might perhaps think my want of punctuality a piece of disrespect on my part, and you know, I think there is nothing entitled to more respect than family customs."

Ursula left the room, I lamented for her own sake her fears and her remarks. She seemed almost humiliated not to say angry at the simplicity of my reception, and one would have said that she was thinking still more of her own vanity than of me. I now remember that my cousin, even while protesting her delight, her felicity at seeing me again, appeared to me annoyed at my arrival, and at first I attributed that feeling of annoyance to the childish motives which I have mentioned. I was soon to know the true and miserable cause of her embarrassment.

I dressed as quickly and as simply as I could—Ursula knocked at my door.

"You will excuse my mother-in-law's not having come to see you, but she has some difficulty in walking, and it would have been a

becoming one. There is nothing more meanly and distressingly vulgar than all that false and noisy assiduity, those humble protestations, and those exaggerated regrets at being nothing but poor country people unworthy of receiving *any body from the capital* (the *sous-préfecture* style as Mademoiselle de Maran used to say.)

M. Sécherin hastily entered, he seemed delighted to see me, and came to me with open arms, to embrace me. This movement of his was so natural, so cordial, that I offered him my two cheeks, not without a slight smile and blush. M. Sécherin made the room echo again, with a couple of hearty kisses, to Ursula's great confusion, who could not help saying to him in a half whisper.

"Really, monsieur, you are mad! What manners! Pray forgive him, Matilda!"

"What do you mean by your 'what manners!'" he exclaimed. "Is it because I have kissed my cousin's two cheeks with all my heart? All I can say is that I am delighted to see her, and that is my way of proving it to her."

"Do you not see Ursula is jealous, my dear cousin?" I laughingly said to M. Sécherin.

He nevertheless seemed to have reflected upon Ursula's words, and said to me with a look of confusion, almost of sadness.

"After all, my wife perhaps is right. Doubtless, cousin, I was wrong. Pardon me, but I was really so happy to see you that I did not reflect whether it were the custom to embrace you, or not."

"I have a good mind, my dear cousin, to ask you to begin again, so as to teach Ursula not to scold you any more unjustly."

"Indeed? then you are not angry?" exclaimed M. Sécherin, whose countenance instantly cleared up.

"Do I look as if I were?" I replied to him.

"God bless my soul! how uncommonly kind you are to be sure! For all the world like your excellent aunt Mademoiselle de Maran. And by-the-bye, how is that excellent lady?"

"She is quite well," I replied, feeling somewhat embarrassed and exchanging a glance with Ursula.

"Ah! mamma," continued M. Sécherin, with enthusiasm, "you have no idea what a good woman that Mademoiselle de Maran—Madame de Lancry's aunt—is!" She has no more nonsense about her than that!" with a snap of his fingers. "In short she and you, mamma, are as like one another in disposition as two peas! she is a second yourself, and that is saying all."

"You have always told me so, my son, and I believe you."

"And I shall always say so. There is Madame de Lancry who will tell you the same thing. The first time I saw her, Mademoiselle de Maran began talking to me directly, just as you would have talked to me yourself, mamma, she remonstrated with me,

indeed she lectured me a little because I used some expressions which I ought not to have done. And such frankness is so rare—ain't it mamma?"

"The old owe the lessons of their experience to the young; it is for that God leaves them upon earth," replied Madame Sécherin with simplicity, and continuing to turn her wheel. Then happening to look up at her son she said to him. "Are you going to the town to-night?"

"No, mamma. What made you think I was going there?"

"You have got on your black coat, and a white cravat, and you are fresh shaved."

"That was my wife's idea, mamma, she told me to go and smarten myself up on Madame de Lancry's account. I had nothing but my blouse on when I returned from the factory."

"How is this, Ursula? On my account! oh! cousin, I and you shall quarrel if you change your usual customs, in any one respect, while I am here."

"There! I told you so, *Bellotte*," said M. Sécherin. "I was sure that Madame de Lancry would not care twopence about my sitting down to table in my blouse and my day-before-yesterday's beard."

"Once more, my dear cousin, I should be in despair at having come here, were I to become a restraint upon you in any respect."

"Well then, it is a bargain, cousin. I agree to it, and for the future, whatever my wife may say, I will keep on my blouse. You will forgive me, won't you? The fact is, that when one has been hard at work all day one likes deucedly to be at one's ease at night."

"The fact is that you labour as hard as if you still had your fortune to make, my son," said Madame Sécherin, with a sigh, "and yet God in his goodness sent a blessing upon your father's industry."

"Make your mind easy, mamma; when my income amounts to a clear hundred thousand francs per annum, I shall stop the machinery. I have said to myself, 'My wife thinks I am not rich enough yet, she wants to have a hundred thousand francs a year, to cut a dash at Paris with. Very well then, she shall have her hundred thousand francs a year! It is so sweet, so delightful to think that all the trouble I take is pleasing to my wife, to think, in short, that it is in my power to realize all her wishes, and that I have only got to work in order to do so. Really, cousin, when I think of that I am as happy as a prince at being able to work like a negro. This accounts for my hands being so black, for I have no time to make myself a dandy!' " said M. Sécherin with a loud laugh. And he shewed me his immense hands which certainly bore witness to the veracity of his joke.

Ursula reddened with shame and anger, and gave her husband

a furious look, The poor fellow glanced timidly at me, and contemplated his hands with a look of extreme confusion.

"And when that honorable hand is offered as the pledge of a sincere promise, or a sincere friendship, the friendship or the promise so pledged is sacred!—I know it," I said to M. Sécherin offering him my hand.

This movement, those simple words, which were inspired by my sympathy for that excellent man, who was as honourable and devoted as he was unpolished, brought the tears into his eyes: he lifted my hand to his lips almost with veneration.

His mother interrupted her work, looked fixedly at me, and said to me in a voice of much emotion,

"Madame, will you permit me to embrace you? *you—you* do justice indeed to my poor son!"

And with a severe look at Ursula, who shrugged her shoulders, Madame Sécherin made a movement to get up.

"Do not disturb yourself, madame," I said to her and bending towards her as I spoke.

She kissed me twice upon the forehead. When I looked at her I saw two tears gliding down her venerable cheeks. She slowly wiped them off without saying a word and returned to her spinning.

"My poor mother—you quite spoil her by talking to her, about me, in that way," whispered M. Sécherin to me with a look of emotion.

All this had passed with the utmost rapidity.

On looking at Ursula I was surprised at the ironical expression with which she contemplated this scene.

The clock of M. Sécherin's factory struck eight.

"Mamma, give me your arm—let's go to supper—I have got a tremendous appetite," said M. Sécherin, to his mother, as he advanced towards her.

"No, no, my son, give your hand to your cousin; my daughter-in-law will assist me."

"Another change in the family customs which I will not allow, madame; are we not all one family here?" I said taking Ursula's arm.

"Madame de Lancry is right; come, mamma," said M. Sécherin approaching his mother, who leant upon him, and passed on before us.

"Really, Matilda," said Ursula to me in a half whisper, and with almost an air of annoyance, "you have made, as you wished, a conquest of my mother-in-law. I never before heard her desire her son to offer his arm to any other person but herself. Female relations of ours have dined here twenty times, and such a thing never happened."

"So much the better, I am quite proud of my conquest," I replied with a smile to Ursula, "for I think your mother-in-law a very respectable and dignified person."

"Dignified?—my mother-in-law—you think *her* dignified? Why you must be laughing at both her and us."

"So dignified do I think her, that in my opinion she is a marvellous type of one of those old women of provincial nobility about whom Mademoiselle de Maran was always talking to us, don't you remember?—who used to live at their country seats without ever visiting Paris or the court."

Ursula looked at me with astonishment, she thought I was joking, but I was quite sincere in what I said. Nothing is more imposing than old age when it is simple, sedate and venerable, and possesses the consciousness of its own authority. We now ~~sate~~ sat down to table.

"Mamma—the keys for the wine," said M. Sécherin to his mother.

Ursula again blushed with confusion, and annoyance, while her mother-in-law slowly drew from her pocket an immense bunch of keys which she gave to one of the country serving girls.

M. Sécherin said grace and we began supper.

The repast was an excellent, almost a delicate one, served up without the slightest pretensions, but with the most scrupulous cleanness.

"Cousin, you must taste some of mamma's pastry," said M. Sécherin, offering me some from a dish which stood before him. "you will see how good it is, there is nobody like mamma for making those tarts. My only misfortune is that *Bellotte* will not learn to make them, but the fact is my little wife don't take at all kindly to the pastry line."

"She is very wrong there, my cousin, for she is derogating from one of our family celebrities," I replied to him as seriously as possible.

"Pooh, pooh! how do you make that out, cousin?"

"Why Ursula," I said to my cousin, "don't you remember that Mademoiselle de Maran always told us our great aunt de Surgy, and the Countess of Brionne (a princess of the Lorraine family, you will please to remark, M. Sécherin) had quite a mania for making milk curds *au jasmin*, and tartlets *à la gelée d'oranges*, and Louis the Fifteenth, added my aunt, was perfectly delighted when those ladies consented to let him taste their *culinary performances*. Once more, don't you remember that?"

"Yes, yes," said Ursula, "I had forgotten it."

"Tartlets *à la gelée d'oranges*! they must be excellent," said Madame Sécherin, "and I shall try my hand at them."

"Well, *Bellotte*, does not that decide you? Surely if a princess of Lorraine made tartlets, you might do so."

"Excuse me—I have no taste for those sorts of amusements," said Ursula, "and besides I have not the honour of belonging to the family of Lorraine."

"But mamma does not belong to the family of Lorraine either, and that does not prevent her making cakes—so surely you might."

I had pity upon Ursula's impatience, and interrupted her husband by asking him if he were satisfied with his manufactory. He was enchanted at that question, and entered into all kinds of details which really interested me very much. There is always a curious and instructive side to be sought for, and found in men who are devoted to one special pursuit. Once in the midst of ideas relative to facts with which he was marvellously well acquainted, M. Sécherin expressed himself with facility, justice, and, if not eloquence—at least with soul and energy. I remember asking him if he employed many children in his manufactory.

"I employ all I can get hold of," he replied, with a smile, "and when I have once got them I don't let them get away again. I take care that the parents shall sign a good safe bond, and they are thus compelled to leave them with me as long as possible."

"What advantage then do you find in employing children?"

"What advantage cousin? why that of preventing their parents who are often selfish and harsh from overworking the poor little wretches. In my factory they only do what they are able, learn a good trade, and become honest and industrious, always having good examples before their eyes, for I never keep worthless persons in my establishments they are a cause of considerable expense certainly, because, the poor children cost me more than they bring me in; but that don't signify, it is a luxury of mine—and when I see them happy, robust and working gaily, upon my word, cousin, I perceive that, after all, I have put my money out to famous interest."

"I admire your tender feelings upon this subject, so much the more, my good cousin because I have heard it said that several of your fellow manufacturers—"

"Destroyed children by over working them?" exclaimed M. Sécherin with indignation, "the scoundrels! I'll tell you what cousin, that puts me in mind of a circumstance which I never mentioned to my wife or to mamma, for it was not worth while, and it would have given me the reputation of a quarrelsome fellow, but since we are upon this subject I will tell it all to you. One day, at the time of my marriage, I went to inspect a manufactory at Paris, what did I see? poor, emaciated, sickly children working more laboriously than men, and for what a salary good God!—scarcely enough to buy bread with—upon my soul I was so disgusted

that I made no more ado, but said to the master of the establishment who was shewing me over it. 'How can you have the courage to kill these poor little wretches bit by bit, as you certainly are doing, sir?' The man replied that I was meddling in what did not concern me, and that he had no need of my observations. I answered that it *was* my business, that I was a manufacturer also, and that the cruel greediness of fellows like him was sufficient to cast a stigma upon an honourable profession. He told me to go to the devil, I told him to do the same; I am naturally as gentle as a lamb, cousin, but when people get my blood up, I cannot answer for myself, in short, I don't know how it happened, but we got to abusing one another in fine style, my hand is rather too hasty a one, the other fellow had served in the army, so the next day we fought. I had never touched a pistol, but I am a tolerable shot at game. To end the story, I sent a bullet into the calf of his right leg, for he turned his toes out like a dancing master."

"My son! my son! did you really fight?" exclaimed Madame Sécherin, who had listened to this simple narrative with all the marks of a profound anxiety, and she clasped her hands together with a feeling of terror.

"There, I knew it would be so, mamma is going to grumble at me now," whispered M. Sécherin to me.

Then getting up and going to her, he said in an accent full of a respectful tenderness.

"Well, well, mamma, I was wrong, it was a hot-headed stripling's trick—I never said anything to you about it because it would have made you very uneasy."

"My child! my poor child!" said Madame Sécherin, embracing her son with emotion, "how you hurt me!"

"But, God bless my soul, mamma, it is all over now."

"Your birth also is over, and every day of my life I thank the Lord for having given me a good son," said Madame Sécherin with a touching simplicity, and wiping her tears.

This scene (which proved to me that Ursula's husband was, when occasion offered, as courageous and energetic as honourable and devoted) was interrupted by one of the two servant girls who gave a letter to M. Sécherin.

"This is from Chopinelle, my dear," he said to Ursula. "He is probably unable to come and play his usual game to-night."

M. Sécherin broke the seal and read the letter.

"Is that from one of your neighbours?" I asked Ursula.

"It is from our *sous-préfet*," she replied with a blush.

Surprised at seeing her blush I looked at her attentively, not in order to embarrass her, but by a mere mechanical movement: to my great astonishment, however, Ursula became crimson.

"It is from him," replied M. Sécherin, "he cannot come this

evening, he has some circulars to write, for there is a talk of fresh elections. Chopinelle is a delightful fellow: and devilish good looking! *He* is always well dressed if you like, shaves every day, and wears gloves. Did you never meet Chopinelle in society, cousin?"

"I think not," I replied with a smile, "I do not know the name."

"And yet he goes into all the tip top circles when he is at Paris, doesn't he my dear? He dines with the ministers, and is quite the pet of the noble *faubourg*—as he always calls it—ain't he *Bellotte*?"

"I think M. Chopinelle is a bragger," said Ursula drily.

"Dear me how drolly you say that, you too who always get angry when he is contradicted and who listen to him as if he were an oracle!"

"I think M. Chopinelle is a liar," said Madame Sécherin in a somewhat severe accent.

"Take care, mamma, or you will bring upon yourself a nice quarrel with Ursula if you abuse her compatriot, for Chopinelle is a Parisian, like her, and moreover her privileged partner in the waltz, and very useful in singing duets with her: for Chopinelle has a superb voice, hasn't he *Bellotte*? a voice as sonorous as the pipe of an organ. You must let our cousin hear you two sing that pretty duet—you know which I mean—that one which you practised so long—that duet out of some Italian opera and which ends in—i."

Ursula, wishing doubtless to interrupt a conversation which was disagreeable to her, said to her mother-in-law,

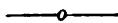
"My cousin is fatigued after her journey—She has need of rest."

"True, daughter-in-law. Pardon me, madame," added Madame Sécherin, turning towards me. "Say the second grace, my son."

When grace had been said we returned to the drawing-room.

I wished my hosts good night, and went up stairs to my own room with Ursula.

"To-morrow morning I will come and call you, and we will have a chat together," she said to me with air of embarrassment. "To-night you must be tired, so go to sleep."



## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE LETTER.

THE next morning when I awoke I wrote a long letter to Gontran

to implore him to join me at Rouvray as soon as possible. My husband would find this letter at Paris on his return from London, it was possible therefore that I might see him in a week's time. It was the first time I had written to Gontran, and I felt an infinite delight in that charming occupation, I had so much to tell him. Every instant I was on the point of relating everything to him, but I remembered M. de Mortagne's counsels and resigned myself to silence.

When I had finished my letter I waited with some impatience for Ursula.

All the memories of my childish days and of my girlhood had been aroused, the sorrows I had experienced had developed and matured my judgment. It was with sincere grief that I saw my cousin do injustice to the solid and excellent qualities of her husband. Exaggerated as was the melancholy which Ursula used to affect in former days, I preferred even that exaggeration to the dry, decided, almost contemptuous tone which she seemed to me to have adopted, with regard to her mother-in-law and M. Sécherin. When I reflected more deeply upon this point, I found excuses for Ursula; she was isolated, with no one to advise her, and once entangled in a mistaken path she was sure to lose herself more and more every day, for the want of a salutary and friendly warning. Several times I thought of my cousin's blushes and embarrassment when her husband mentioned that M. Chopinelle. In her isolation perhaps Ursula had shewn herself somewhat coquettish towards that man. I determined to speak to her with the utmost frankness on the subject, and to implore her not to expose herself to any painful domestic dissensions for so miserable an object,

Madame Sécherin appeared to me a very sensible, firm, and ob-servant woman. She evidently possessed more influence over her son than even perhaps Ursula herself, and I fancied that she was cherishing some secret grudge against the latter, and that she was only restraining herself till a convenient opportunity offered itself for an explosion. Persons of that disposition, who are ordinarily, prudent, calm, determined, endowed with a penetrating mind, a simple and honourable heart, and an austere piety, are incapable of mincing matters or compromising them; their religious impartiality makes it their duty to wait for *proofs* with unconquerable patience, but when they are once satisfied of the truth and justice of their views, they become insensible to pity.

Ursula entered my apartment.

After a few trivial observations, I said to her—

“I am going to scold you, sister. You are not reasonable, you promised me to educate your husband, if I may use the expression, and to polish him a little; with a few obliging and tender words, you could do anything with him. For I am sure, that I myself who

have no influence over him shall metamorphose him in a few days, much to his advantage."

"You are a good hand at miracles. Have you not bewitched my mother-in-law? My husband told me this morning that she was in raptures with you."

"If I admit this triumph of mine, you will confess that it is far from difficult to make oneself beloved?"

"Not difficult certainly, my dear Matilda, but a great bore. I do not feel any need of Madame Sécherin's affection."

"Listen, Ursula, you have formed, believe me, an erroneous opinion of your mother-in-law's character and disposition."

"You found out first her aristocratic look, and now I suppose you are going to discover that she is a genius," said Ursula with an ironical smile.

"A genius? no—but a woman of great penetration. She is continually on the watch."

"What can she be watching? I do not fear her."

"I do not think you do—yet why do you not treat her with consideration?"

"What would be the use of that? I should like to see you, my poor Matilda, in my place!"

"In your place I should amuse myself above all things."

"Here?"

"Here."

"And how?"

"I will tell you how—in making myself beloved, in trying my power in performing miracles; in changing your husband almost into a man of elegance; and in bringing your mother-in-law to anticipate even, all the improvements that would be desirable in this house which you detest so much."

"It is impossible: you have no idea of Madame Sécherin's obstinacy, and my husband's horror of any restraint or interference with his habits."

"Try at all events. How have I managed since yesterday to become such a favourite with her?"

"Oh! you are so fascinating, you know how to please and how to conceal disagreeable impressions. As for me I cannot dissemble, I carry my frankness to a fault. For some months I was in a state of profound melancholy and sadness; but my despair was worn out by force of tears. Now I have become hardened, I have suffered so much! My heart is insensible even to sorrow, I mock, I despise, and I like that better."

Since the beginning of our conversation Ursula's accent had been nervous, abrupt and harsh.

"Sister," I said to her, "you are not in your natural state, you are concealing some sorrow from me."

"None, I swear to you, I have made up my mind; when we have acquired fortune enough to allow us to live at Paris I will go there: till then I shall live mechanically, flying from the dreams of my girlhood when they sometimes *will* rise before my eyes, in spite of myself—for those cherished memories bring back to me, too much, your image, and our days of happiness. Ah! Matilda! Matilda! you have spoiled me for existence," added Ursula.

After a silence of some duration, she burst into tears as if she were suddenly giving way to an emotion which she had restrained till then.

"Oh! I was certain," I exclaimed, "that my friend, my sister was concealing something from me, that those short and bitter words of hers came from her lips and not from her heart!"

"Well then! yes—yes, forgive me. Yesterday, after the first joyful emotion caused me by your arrival, I was seized by an evil sentiment, I became ashamed of everything that surrounded me, I became ashamed of my habitual melancholy, I was afraid of appearing ridiculous in your eyes with my eternal tears; I determined to be resolute—heedless—ironical—but I cannot support that part of falsity and dissimulation—I cannot lie to you, and in your presence. Your poor Ursula feels to-day as deeply, more deeply perhaps than before, the miseries of the moral *mésalliance* which she has contracted. Yesterday—this morning—when I complained of the melancholy of this habitation I was speaking falsely—I was speaking falsely when I lamented its want of elegance. What matters it to me in what frame my life may be set, when that life itself is for ever withered? Ah! Matilda, with a heart which understood me, the most hard, the most miserable existence would have been enchanting."

"Poor Ursula, I love you better so, I love your tears better than your cold and ironical smile. And yet, tell me, your husband seems to anticipate the least wish you form. Although he is already rich he continues to labour on unremittingly that he may some day satisfy your taste for opulence."

"You are alluding, are you not, Matilda, to that fortune which I have commanded him to acquire, in order to go and lead a brilliant existence at Paris?" said Ursula with a bitter smile, "you think me very selfish, very covetous, very vain, do you not?"

"Ursula, you are mad! I do not say that."

"No, no, it is true, pardon me Matilda. But I should grieve indeed if you suspected that I were capable of that disgraceful avidity for money. Listen to me then. When I arrived here my husband talked of giving up his manufactory, of living in leisure, and of devoting every instant to me. Shall I confess it to you, Matilda? I was terrified, more, perhaps, on his account

than my own, at that unoccupied existence which he offered to share with me. Our tastes are so different—there is so little sympathy between us—and then I knew it would cost him much to give up occupations so interesting, and habits of activity which to him were a second nature, on which his very health almost depended. I should have recompensed so great a sacrifice so unworthily, that I would not accept it. In order therefore to render my refusal less painful to his self love, in order not to say to him ‘That leisure which you wish to devote to me, would to me be indifferent or painful,’ it was necessary that I should find out some pretext. I then found myself forced to feign a sort of inordinate covetousness and vanity, and I told him that instead of giving up business, he would, on the contrary, give me much pleasure by continuing his avocations till he had acquired a fortune sufficiently considerable to allow us to lead a brilliant life at Paris. A fortune! a brilliant life! Matilda! Matilda! you know me, you know the value I set upon luxury and splendour, and even were my husband to realize the fortune he dreams of, alas! I feel that I should not live to enjoy it—my life is wasting away slowly and secretly, oh my sister!”

Ursula, as she uttered these last words, let her head fall mournfully upon her breast, she seemed overpowered by some immense sorrow. The melancholy expression of her countenance, the languor of her half veiled glance, were in such accordance with her gloomy words that I own I believed blindly all she said. She found a way to make it appear that she was still sacrificing herself to her husband even while she was compelling him to labour unremittingly in order to increase a fortune that was already considerable. I carried my blindness so far as to become uneasy at Ursula’s sinister presentiments, and I combated them vehemently.

“But after all,” I said to her, “why do you picture to yourself so gloomy a futurity? why renounce all hope?”

Ursula took my two hands, fixed her blue eyes, which were bathed in tears, upon my face and murmured in a voice of painful emotion.

“You talk of hope, sister—alas! as I wrote to you the day after that fatal union *my hope is a poor, obscure place in the village cemetery: my futurity is eternity.*”

And Ursula leant her head upon my shoulder and wept.

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By degrees she became more calm.

Our conversation had assumed such a character that I did not see any possible transition by which I could ask her if she had indulged in any trifling coquetry with M. Chopinelle.

Knowing my cousin's enthusiasm and the unoccupied condition of her heart, I feared the dangers of solitude on her account, I believed it to be useful, nay urgent, that I should impart my fears to her, so I did not hesitate.

"Tell me, Ursula, do you see much society?" I asked her.

"Some relations of my husband's and some Rouvray merchants with whom he transacts business."

"But you have no very intimate acquaintance?"

"Yes, one or two old friends of my mother-in-law's, sometimes the *substitut* of the *procureur du roi*, and also our *sous-préfet*."

"That Monsieur Chopinelle?"

"Precisely, he who wrote to my husband yesterday you know."

Ursula pronounced these words in so natural a manner, with so little embarrassment, that I believed my suspicions to be without foundation.

"And you sing duets with him. Does he sing well?"

"Execrably, and always out of tune. Unluckily M. Sécherin is very intimate with him, and I have been obliged, out of politeness, to undergo I do not know how many duets, and repetitions of duets with him. Ah! Matilda," added Ursula with a melancholy shake of the head, 'do you remember what we used to say? 'Music when spoken by two is a divine and sacred language which must not be profaned.' And oh! how much have I suffered in being compelled to sing with that man, I who thought as you did that 'it is only with a person tenderly beloved one can partake of those impulses of the soul, those passionate accents which singing only can do justice to!'"

Effectively I remembered that in the plenitude of our admiration for music we could not understand how one could have the courage or ability to sing a passionate duet with any person but one whom one loved. Ursula's last words destroyed all my doubts about her coquetry, and I was bold enough to say to her with a smile.

"You will laugh at me finely. Only conceive my having taken a fancy into my head that you were engaged in a flirtation with that *sous-préfet* of yours!"

Ursula in spite of the tears which were still trembling at the ends of her long eyelashes, burst into so frank, unaffected and hearty a fit of laughter that I was put quite out of countenance.

"M. Chopinelle!" she exclaimed in the midst of her peals of laughter—good God, what a singular idea! You do not know what M. Chopinelle is, you will see him. God bless me, God bless me—fancy my being engaged in a flirtation with M. Chopinelle!!!"

Laughter is contagious, and in spite of myself I partook in my cousin's merriment.

When this ebullition of gaiety had become quite calmed, Ursula,

with one of those sudden changes of impression, which were one of her greatest fascinations, said to me in a melancholy voice.

"Alas ! Matilda, one cause of my despairing sorrow is, believe me, because I feel that my heart is dead—dead for ever. That poor heart has been so grievously crushed by long and suppressed suffering, that *now* it scarcely beats at all, and your friendship—your friendship alone—causes the few faint pulsations which still remain. And then, my sister—" added Ursula with a touching dignity—"though doubtless my husband is deficient in all those qualities which inspire, nay command passion—that dream of woman's life—still he is good, honourable and devoted, and, believe me, Matilda, it would be as impossible for me to outrage as love him."

"Well, said my Ursula, there I recognize your own heart." I exclaimed, pressing her hand.

"And then," she continued with a smile of such heartrending expression that it brought tears into my eyes. "I am like poor children who are in pain. I find a species of sweet consolation in being pitied—and how should I ever dare to complain were I guilty?"

I was doubtless thoroughly prejudiced in Ursula's favour, but would not the most distrustful, the most suspicious disposition have been disarmed, as I was, by the appearance of so ingenuous a simplicity ? Gay raillery, sensibility, delicacy, dignity—Ursula had employed all to convince me, and I *was* convinced. Now, when I am better informed, I still remain confounded, I could almost dare to say with admiration (for there are things beautiful even in their horror) at reflecting with what profound artfulness that woman knew how to make every string of the heart vibrate in its turn, with what dexterity, what suppleness she passed from tears to smiles, from candour to dignity, from pride to tenderness in order to make you believe a falsehood. Attacking everything, your mind, your heart, your vices, your virtues, your sympathies, your hatreds, she did not leave one single fibre of your intelligence, and your soul without having probed it to the quick.

\* \* \* \* \*

About three o'clock, while M. Sécherin was engaged at his factory, Madame Sécherin enjoyed her usual *siesta*, and I was sitting in the drawing-room with Ursula, M. Chopinelle made his appearance.

M. Chopinelle was a young man ; dark, with a full, ruddy countenance and black whiskers ; his coarse, robust figure was ungraceful, his feet and hands enormous ; his features, which were tolerably regular, though common in their expression, would probably entitle him among provincials to the reputation of being good looking. On account probably of the season of the year he wore a straw hat, and a cravat à la Colin ; a green barracan coat with metal buttons, blue

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M. Chopinelle et Rouvray

striped trousers, and grey buckskin shoes, completed this Arcadian costume. At the first sight of this vulgar personage I felt completely re-assured as to the tranquillity of Ursula's heart. I will add—adopting for once a little of Mademoiselle de Maran's wit and language—that M. Chopinelle to his *sweet William* exterior united a delectable and bridle kind of self-complacency slightly kept in check by a would-be official reserve and haughtiness, which gave you altogether a complete idea of foolish conceit, and vulgar incapacity.

I exchanged a malicious smile with my cousin, who replied with a cold bow to M. Chopinelle's noisy and familiar salutations. He appeared to me to enter the drawing-room like a conquering hero, or an intimate friend impatiently expected. He seemed quite taken aback at Ursula's freezing reception. M. Chopinelle, suddenly appeared to reflect, and doubtless became conscious that his victorious airs were miserably out of place in the presence of a stranger. He smiled with an air of assurance, and his look seemed to say to Ursula, "Do not be uneasy, fear nothing, I will take care not to compromise you, and to keep our intelligence perfectly concealed."

I was disgusted at this insolent and ridiculous presumption; for at that time I did not for a moment suppose that my cousin's conduct had in any respect authorized M. Chopinelle's impertinent affectation.

"What is the news at Rouvray, Monsieur Chopinelle?" said Ursula to him, continuing to work at her frame.

"Nothing very important, madame, except in an official point of view—" and he added in a consequential and mysterious tone—"People talk of a dissolution. My correspondence has taken up my time so thoroughly that I was unable to come yesterday for a game with our *gros Tourangeau*. It can't be helped, official men must think of business before politeness."

I looked at Ursula, who shrugged her shoulders.

Those words—"our *gros Tourangeau*," were doubtless intended to refer to her husband. I was disgusted at this railery.

M. Chopinelle continued—

"You may be sure, madame, that my regret was not confined to that," he added with a gracious bow to Ursula, "but the state must have precedence of every thing else."

"M. Chopinelle, my dear, our *sous-préfet*," said Ursula to me, indicating M. Chopinelle by an inclination of her head.

I bowed slightly.

"Has madame just arrived from the *capital*?"

"I have, sir."

"Madame will find the province very dull, very tiresome, very stupid! To us Parisians it is quite a Siberia, an exile—one might as well go to the antipodes at once—you have no idea, madame, of

the figures one sees in my *arrondissement*, and of the life one leads here, upon my honour one might fancy oneself among the Hurons—or worse. Fortunately Madame Sécherin has been cast, like myself, upon this outlandish place, and if you, madame, remain here for any time, we will get up a little Parisian colony in the midst of these Touraine savages. Madame is musical no doubt?" M. Chopinelle inquired of me.

Luckily he took upon himself to answer for me, and added—

"I have not the least doubt of it. I would bet that madame has a charming voice; we will transport the country of the arts hither. Madame Sécherin's musical abilities are enchanting—of course I mean Madame Sécherin junior, for her mother-in-law never knew how to sing anything but the mass ha! ha! ha!"

M. Chopinelle looked at me quite proud of his impertinent observation.

He perceived that it was not to my taste, and turned towards Ursula.

"Monsieur," she drily replied, "I think your observation on my husband's mother is in extremely bad taste."

M. Chopinelle was still more astonished.

"You must be angry with me about something, to receive me in this manner. One would say I was a stranger to you," he observed with a certain annoyance.

"Really, Monsieur, I do not know what you mean. Let us talk if you like about the new road which you are always promising us," replied Ursula with the greatest coolness.

M. Chopinelle seemed excessively offended, and wishing doubtless to justify the familiar language which he affected towards my cousin, he forgot himself so far as to say.

"I do not know if it is the presence of Madame which intimidates you so much, but you must acknowledge that in general, Madame, you treat me with much less ceremony! I am no longer the friend of the family then? very well—very well—I give you notice I shall complain to my dear Sécherin."

Had not my confidence in Ursula been foolishly blind, the bad humour of this excessively ill-educated personage, would have given me a good deal to think about. But I only saw in M. Chopinelle a ridiculous coxcomb, who wished in my presence to abuse that appearance of intimacy which is authorised by a country life, in order to make me believe that Ursula took some interest in him. It is to give an idea of this man's absurdity that I have mentioned a few sentences of his conversation, which was a wearisome medley of common-places, and insupportable pretensions. I never understood the pleasure of amusing oneself with fools, their vulgarity and silliness are disgusting to me, and affect me quite as painfully as the sight of a physical infirmity. The coldness and disgust which

I could not help displaying towards M. Chopinelle singularly abridged his visit. When he was gone, Ursula asked me, with a burst of laughter, if I still thought she was interested in this *sous-préfet* ; if it was possible to meet with a more thoroughly absurd personage ; and if I was not ashamed of my suspicions on the subject ?

"I shared Ursula's gaiety, and did not retain the slightest doubt of her sincerity. M. Chopinelle did not make his appearance again for some days to M. Sécherin's great surprise, who overwhelmed his wife with questions, to which she replied with impatience. Completely re-assured as to Ursula's coquetry, I made another discovery in the course of a few days, which delighted me much more. In my presence my cousin's manner towards her husband was cold, indifferent, sometimes contemptuous, yet M. Sécherin did not seem to remark it, he appeared the happiest man in the world, and, to Ursula's great annoyance, was continually making allusions to a thousand circumstances which proved that they were on the best possible terms together, and that his wife was full of attentions towards him. Several times M. Sécherin said to Ursula, with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders—"It is only because our cousin is here that you do not choose to seem fond of me."

Effectively, after having long asked myself why my cousin dissembled a conduct which was so much in conformity with the advice which I had given her, I became convinced that it was in order still to retain the right of calling herself *the least understood*, the most unfortunate of women, and that she might be able to lament to me over the moral *mésalliance* to which she had been sacrificed. This persuasion made me much more easy as to Ursula's destiny.

For the first time I perceived a kind of melancholy monomania in the exaggerated sadness which she had affected during our first interview on my arrival at Rouvray. I did not accuse my cousin of falsehood, I almost pitied her for being ashamed of her own happiness, and for not having the courage to avow that when she had once discovered the noble and generous qualities of her husband, she had wisely made up her mind to put up patiently with some of his vulgarities. Once assured that her sufferings were but pretended, as it were a kind of coquetting with affliction, I had not the courage to thwart Ursula upon that subject. In my belief, and in my eyes she was perfectly happy, the rest was a matter of indifference to me.

I was far from regretting the tears which I had bestowed upon her supposed sorrows. I could scarcely, however, forbear smiling when I thought that the crowning act of Ursula's happiness was to represent herself as the most miserable creature living. The

longer I observed, the more clearly I perceived that her influence over her husband was immense ; and I sometimes even doubted whether it were equalled by that of Madame Sécherin.

The latter still persevered in that constrained coldness towards Ursula, which often appeared to hurt her son's feelings. About a week or ten days after the scene which I have related, M. Chopinelle came to dine at Rouvray. He excused himself for his late absence on the score of numerous business engagements, and M. Sécherin received him with the utmost good humour and cordiality. After supper, instead of playing, as usual, at piquet with her son, Madame Sécherin sat down to her spinning wheel. My cousin went out to give some directions at his factory.

The windows were open, and it was a magnificent night. Ursula and M. Chopinelle were seated in conversation upon a couch placed behind Madame Sécherin's chair, whose attention was completely taken up with her spinning wheel.

A shaded lamp kept the drawing-room in a demi-obscurity. I went and sat down by one of the windows. The sky was clear, the stars brilliant, and I fell into a profound reverie.

I know not how long I had been absorbed in these reflections, when, as I mechanically turned my head, I saw M. Chopinelle, who was sitting close to Ursula, give her a letter which she hastily secured in the pocket of the little apron which she had on. I was almost completely concealed in the recess of the window, and my cousin being unable to see me, doubtless thought that I was equally incapable of perceiving her.

I could scarcely believe my eyes.

At that instant Madame Sécherin interrupted the measured movement of her spinning wheel, and in the most natural manner possible, said to Ursula, half turning round as she spoke—

"Will you be kind enough, daughter-in-law, to come here and assist me to unwind this skein?"

Ursula rose and approached her mother-in-law. I can see the whole scene at this very minute.

Ursula wore a dress of white muslin with red stripes, and an apron of sky blue silk trimmed with black lace ; she stood before Madame Sécherin and held up the skein of flax in her two raised hands. Thinking, no doubt, the employment given her by her mother-in-law, a tiresome one, she gently struck the floor every now and then with the end of her pretty foot.

Suddenly, with a movement quicker than thought, Madame Sécherin thrust her hand into Ursula's apron and seized M. Chopinelle's letter.

"With traitors one must use treachery!" she exclaimed in a menacing voice. "I saw everything in that glass!"

And she pointed to a glass which was placed opposite to her, and which effectively must have reflected all that had just taken place behind her chair.

"Madame!" said Ursula, turning pale.

"I have been watching for a long time," replied Madame Sécherin. "My son shall know everything."

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## CHAPTER XL.

### A NIGHT'S REFLECTIONS.

THIS scene had passed with such rapidity that I had scarcely time to approach Madame Sécherin, and to say to her,

"For God's sake, madame, speak lower, you may be heard, your son may enter the room any minute!"

"I wish he were arrived," replied that inflexible woman.

M. Chopinelle was standing by Ursula, and so completely thunder-struck that he could not utter a syllable,

"Madame!" I exclaimed in my turn, "my cousin is more imprudent than culpable."

"My poor son!" said Madame Sécherin, without replying to me, and gazing in sorrow on the letter which she had just surprised. "And for this woman he is killing himself with labour! and for this woman he sometimes forgets his mother. But God is just! yes—yes—he is just, he does not permit the guilty to remain unpunished."

She rang the bell, which was answered by a servant girl.

"Go and tell my son that I wish to speak to him this instant; he is at the factory," said Madame Sécherin.

The girl left the room to obey this order. I looked at Ursula, her immovable calmness confounded me.

"You will at last be treated as you deserve," said Madame Sécherin, indignantly to her, and shewing her the letter, "my son shall know every thing."

Ursula had completely recovered her coolness. She looked at her mother-in-law with the most simple air of astonishment in the world, and said to her.

"Really, madame, I do not understand your reproaches, nor do I know to what you allude in telling me that I shall be treated as I deserve. I think that before you accuse me, you ought to open that letter—if that letter it is which excites your anger—and make yourself mistress of its contents."

Madame Sécherin hastily raised her head and gazed at my cousin with an air of profound surprise.

"God bless my soul, madame, nothing can be more simple. My husband's *fête* day will soon be here. I have given monsieur—" and she pointed to M. Chopinelle—"a commission to execute with respect to a little surprise which I am preparing for M. Sécherin. In case M. Chopinelle should not be able to converse with me alone about this commission, and being desirous that it should remain a secret, I had requested him to write me a line on the subject. There you have the clue to all this wonderfully mysterious and important affair madame."

This explanation removed an immense weight from my heart, and I threw myself into Ursula's arms. She had expressed herself in so simple, so natural and so unaffected a manner, that I reproached myself bitterly for having suspected her.

I said to Madame Sécherin, "You see madame you are mistaken."

Madame Sécherin was astonished. She gazed fixedly at the letter which she held in her hands and appeared unable to believe what she heard.

"What! "she said aloud to herself, "can I have deceived myself to such a degree as that? So long too as I have been watching them? But no—no," she continued hastily, and breaking open the seal of the letter, "a mother's heart cannot be mistaken. Why should I feel so much aversion for that woman? I am not by disposition inclined to injustice or hatred. No—no—she must be guilty! she is guilty!"

She approached the lamp in order to read the letter, and looked about for her spectacles. My cousin's countenance remained immovable. She said with a smile to M. Chopinelle.

"Well, Monsieur—there is an end of our surprise!"

The *sous-préfet* looked at my cousin with a stupified and bewildered air, then hastily seized his hat and hurried towards the door. He met M. Sécherin, who was just coming in.

The latter caught him by the arm, pulled him back, and said to him with a laugh.

"What are you off already, Chopinelle? Are you mad? What is to become of my revenge at *écarté* which you were to give me? Come, come, you don't get away from me like that."

"There is my son at last—"exclaimed Madame Sécherin, who was still holding the letter open without having yet glanced at its contents, "every thing will now be cleared up."

M. Sécherin had brought back M. Chopinelle with him, and still held him by the arm, "cleared up? what is it, mamma?" he exclaimed.

"Oh! my love! a most terrible adventure," Ursula hastened to exclaim with gaiety. "Only fancy, M. Chopinelle gave me a letter secretly just now—Yes—he really did—and in the most mysterious manner possible, exactly as if it had been nothing more or less than

a declaration of love ! Now, do you know what this letter is about ? Alas ! I must resign myself to inform you. It contains some directions relative to a surprise which I was preparing for you on your *fête* day, and of which I had given the commission to M. Chopinelle ; it being extremely probable that I should not have the opportunity of conversing alone with Monsieur, I had requested him to write me word what he might be unable to tell me himself personally, so that no one might suspect anything about the business. Now unfortunately, the whole thing has come out, and I shall not be able to enjoy my surprise."

"Why, to be sure—yes—the day after to-morrow is the *Saint-Benoît*," said M. Sécherin. "What, my dear, do you wish to pet me so much as all that ? And fancy taking this good Chopinelle here as an accomplice ! Ha ! ha ! *Monsieur le sous-préfet* you want to league with my wife ?" he added with a loud burst of laughter. "Ah ! you two are conspiring together to surprise me are you ?"

"A surprise !" said Madame Sécherin with a piercing glance at Ursula, "we shall soon see."

She now unfolded the letter.

M. Chopinelle became fearfully pale—I shuddered, a frightful presentiment told me that Ursula, with a presence of mind which astounded me, and by the aid of an audacious falsehood, had merely delayed a terrible exposure.

Seeing the emotion of the *sous-préfet* I was convinced that the letter was one of love. I determined at all risks to attempt saving Ursula for the last time, and I exclaimed, endeavoring to conceal the tremor of my voice.

"You know, my dear cousin, that these sort of surprises are sacred, and that they ought to be respected."

"Of course they ought ! so mamma, I entreat you do not read that letter, and give it back to Ursula, so that she and her accomplice may go on plotting all their little wickednesses together, and I will make believe to know nothing about it all."

"Give me the letter, give me the letter, Madame !" exclaimed M. Chopinelle, extending his hand.

That hand trembled like a leaf.

I thought that everything was lost.

At that moment, Ursula, who had not taken her eyes off her mother-in-law, and who had by degrees, and stealthily been approaching nearer and nearer towards her, seized the letter with a loud laugh and exclaimed.

"My good mamma, no one shall have the preference. Not even you shall find out the surprise I am preparing."

"Bravo ! bravo ! off with you, my little wife, off with you !" exclaimed M. Sécherin.

Ursula hurried out of the room.

.. Mechanically I followed, as well as M. Chopinelle, who, when we were once fairly out of the drawing-room, exclaimed with an air of bewilderment and wiping his forehead.

"What self-command! she has saved us. Ah! what a woman! what a woman!"

As soon as we were alone my cousin tore up the letter and put the pieces into the pocket of her apron.

"Ah! Ursula!" I said to her in a reproachful tone. "I tremble still! what a terrible lesson! God grant that it may be one that will profit you!"

"You may take credit to yourself for possessing famous presence of mind. Without you everything would have been discovered. I have scarcely a drop of blood in my veins—" exclaimed M. Chopinelle, with an air of consternation. "Ah, Ursula—what a woman you are!"

Had I been able to retain the slightest doubt, these last words of M. Chopinelle's, and his emotion would have sufficed to enlighten me.

My cousin looked at us both with the greatest marks of astonishment, burst into a laugh and said to me—

"Come, come, between ourselves, my good Matilda, are you speaking seriously? what on earth *can* you mean by your *terrible lesson*? Why do you say that to me? what connection have these *terrible* words with an innocent surprise which was nearly discovered? one would think something very serious had happened. You are not going to believe, like my mother-in-law, are you, that there is a declaration of love in all this?" she added with a peal of laughter.

This sarcastic and impudent assurance terrified me, and made me incapable of uttering a word. The *sous-préfet* no less stupified than myself, looked at me, and foolishly exclaimed.

"It is astonishing—I can hardly believe my own ears. Ah! *what a woman!*"

Ursula laughed more loudly than ever, and said—

"And you too M. Chopinelle! you are disturbed—you are quite pale—you are in ecstasies at my presence of mind, which, you say, has prevented everything from being discovered. Really I am in despair at the emotions I have caused you by entrusting you with that poor little commission of mine. But do you know that you are very foolish?" she added with a contemptuous smile—"but do you know that your puzzled and bewildered look would have been sufficient to give an appearance of probability to my mother-in-law's suspicions? For a future statesman, you have very little self-command, and in such a ridiculous business too. What would have happened, I ask yourself, if it had been anything of serious im-

portance?" I have great doubts of your doing much in politics, my poor Monsieur Chopinelle."

"What!" I exclaimed, in spite of myself, indignant at so much audacity, "if your husband had opened that letter?"

"He would have found out the present which I intended to give him on his *fête* day: and our surprise would have been a failure—that's all."

And Ursula looked fixedly at me without a blush.

Her features were as calm and cheerful as if she had spoken the truth.

We were still remaining under the vestibule, and M. Sécherin now joined us as gay as usual.

Ursula exclaimed, as soon as she saw him—

"Your mother is very angry at my childishness, is she not? After all I certainly acted very wrong. Good God—now I think of it—do you know that it seemed as if I feared you should read that letter! Now I am sure your mother represented it to you in that light, and she would have been right, for appearances certainly were against me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said M. Sécherin with a loud laugh. "Are you cracked with your appearances? On the contrary, to my great astonishment, instead of being angry at your snatching the letter out of her hands; mamma looked intently at me without saying a word, she then asked me to give her my arm, and she withdrew into her own apartment, without being able to get a syllable out of her."

Ursula gave a melancholy shake of the head, and said—"I thought so, love, I was certain your mother would be angry with me. How angry I am with myself for having acted in so inconsiderate a manner. Oh! I shall never forgive myself."

And a tear glistened in Ursula's eyes.

"Come, come," exclaimed her husband with emotion. "You will upset yourself, and make yourself quite ill about all that nonsense. Don't I tell you that mamma did not say a word? Come make yourself easy."

It is exactly that: her silence accuses me: she is deeply offended, and, at the very least, must have considered this foolish act of mine as an improper proceeding on my part."

M. Chopinelle had sneaked off while M. Sécherin was consoling Ursula.

Under the plea of a headache I went up stairs into my own room. Ursula and her husband accompanied me as far as my door, and then wished me good night.

I remained alone.

Ursula was guilty—I could not retain the least doubt on that point. My heart was deeply grieved, and I had never experienced

a greater degree of anguish. Ursula then had told me a lie ! a lie throughout ! She was utterly false, her despairing melancholy, her dreamy sadness, her pinings for the ideal, her scruples which took alarm at all that was not of the most exquisite delicacy, were—all and each of them—a mere mockery—a positive pretence. I had compassionated her moral sufferings, and yet she did *not* really suffer ; she had fallen, and fallen without even the excuse of passion and the fascinations which might have been exercised by a man of eminent qualities. She had sacrificed her duties to a ridiculous man, of whom she even was ashamed, for she laughed at and disavowed him with the most immoveable assurance. During that scene, which might have been her ruin, her countenance had remained calm and intrepid, and she had turned off the impending storm with a coolness, a presence of mind, and an audacity which terrified me.

I was grievously hurt by these discoveries.

Alas ! to my shame, I confess it, perhaps the bitterness which accompanied the overthrow of my illusions was still more increased, by the annoyance which one always feels at having been the dupe of one's own kind feelings. And yet, no—no—the more I recal my recollections, the more assured I feel that my bitterest thought was the regret of having lost a sister, the regret that she, in whom I had reposed so many hopes, was no longer worthy of my friendship.

My night was a sad and agitated one.

Next morning, when I was called, my maid told me that M. Sécherin had already been several times to know when I could receive him, as he was extremely desirous of speaking to me. This intelligence caused me considerable uneasiness, I dressed myself as quickly as possible, and sent for my cousin. He soon made his appearance, and I fancied he seemed sad and anxious.

"What have you to tell me, my dear cousin ?"

"Something of great and serious importance, cousin. As you are one of the family and my wife's dearest friend, we ought to have no secrets from you. Guess what has happened to me ? The roof might as well have fallen upon my head. I should never have imagined such a thing. But when old people once get anything into their heads—"

"I do not understand you, cousin."

"Could you have conceived that mamma would be harsh and unjust to my poor wife ?" he exclaimed. "Well, that is the case. Last night Ursula told me everything, crying her eyes out while she did so, till my heart was almost broken. Would you believe it ? when I am not there mamma treats her most unjustly. She is always grumbling at her and scolding her—and Ursula—poor, meek, little lamb as she is—used to bear it all without complaining ! The scene which took place yesterday made the cup overflow."

"The scene yesterday?"

"Yes, certainly. Ursula has told me everything. What most hurt my wife was mamma's absurd suspicions about that letter of Chopinelle's, and well they might! For, after all, as my wife said to me last night, 'you may conceive, my darling, that while it was merely about trifling matters I was able to hold my tongue, but now that your honor and my own are suspected I cannot submit to be silent any longer towards you. It would be almost acknowledging that your mother accuses me with justice.' But this is just the way," exclaimed M. Sécherin, "mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are like fire and water, there is as much trouble with them as when the devil goes to confession. I ought to have expected this, and yet—no—for my poor wife never breathed a word of the matter and gave way to mamma in everything. She is *so* good—so *very* good!"

And he began to pace hurriedly up and down the room.

I saw that Ursula, in order to be beforehand with her mother-in-law, had confessed all this to her husband, and employed the influence she possessed to exculpate herself completely. Although I was indignant at Ursula's conduct and pained at her husband's blindness, I would not say a word which might arouse his suspicions, but I endeavoured to calm the irritation which he seemed to experience against his mother.

"It will all come right, my dear cousin," I said to him. "You know a mother's heart is always a little suspicious and jealous. That is the foible of real affection."

"Yes, yes, I am not angry with *the good woman*. Besides I should only have to say to her—You pretend, mamma, that Chopinelle has been courting my wife for the last three months, well then, for those very three months, my wife has been more affectionate to me than she ever was in her life. It is a fact, cousin, you have no idea how Ursula has been petting and spoiling me, particularly for the last three months—it is '*my great duck*' here, and '*my own darling*' there, for Ursula—to do her justice—does, as your aunt told her, and keeps all those pretty little names for the times when we are alone together. In short, I declare to you, that I have never been more happy, gay, and contented, than I have for these three months. This is not imagination or mere talk, but a positive fact. It is a reality which I have experienced, and which I experience still. So that all which mamma could say or do would not alter the case. Ha, ha, ha," he added with a hearty and sincere laugh, "my wife in love with Chopinelle indeed. What an idea! it is perfect madness. And, as Ursula told me last night, if it were not for being uncivil to Chopinelle, and so losing the chance of the road which would be so much advantage to my manufactory, she would have sent him and his duets about

their business long ago—he bored her to death, and quite tortured her ears, for, instead of singing, he makes a noise it appears, like old Nick with a cold in his head, according to Ursula's account. His *singing*, indeed, always gave me that sort of idea, but as I am no judge I never said anything about it—nor Ursula either, for fear of annoying me by laughing at my intimate friend. I just ask yourself, what *can* mamma have been thinking about to fancy such nonsense? A great, stupid, conceited fellow like that. After all that Chopinelle must be very ridiculous, since my poor Ursula, in spite of her tears, made such fun of him last night, that we both finished by laughing like two children. My wife is so gay, so funny when she likes—you have no idea of it, cousin, because, in your presence, she is on her guard for fear you should think her ill-bred. But, between ourselves, she is naturally the jolliest little woman in the world, and it is on that account that I grieve so much at seeing her out of spirits. One must have a heart of stone to tease such a poor, dear, little lamb, And then mamma (who is kindness itself generally) goes and takes a spite against *her*—*her* of all people in the world."

"I am sure, cousin, that Ursula has nothing to reproach herself with, but, you know, old age is suspicious. And then, after all, it appears to me that your mother hitherto has never said anything to you against your wife!"

"No—certainly—but you will see it will come now, and I can now account for mamma's looks last night. She is not a woman, you must know, to do anything by halves. That silence of hers foretells a violent scene. I know mamma, she don't speak till she has got something to say, but *then*—she is an awful woman."

"The most united families, cousin, are not impenetrable to these discussions, you know, but these little storms soon pass away and are forgotten."

"Certainly, but, after all, as Ursula was saying to me, in order to avoid these storms which you mention, it would be better, perhaps, both for us and mamma to live a little more separated. There is a very pretty house to sell, a stone's throw from here, I and my wife might settle ourselves there, and let mamma have this place to herself: you understand me? she would be much more comfortable. For, after all, as Ursula was saying, it would be for mamma's sake."

"What! leave your mother, my cousin? Oh! take care, she has been used to live with you so long."

"Oh! it would not be like leaving her, we should see her two or three times every day. And then, you know, Ursula's lungs are very delicate, notwithstanding she looks in such good health: and mamma has her meals at such different hours from those which my wife has been accustomed to, that she has the greatest difficulty

in the world to get herself used to them. It would make her ill at last. The poor little woman struggled on as long as she could without saying anything to me, but she has owned to me now that she cannot go on any longer."

"So, cousin, you have almost made up your mind to separate from your mother. This is a very serious resolution, and I think you have adopted it very hastily; you had not a thought of it yesterday?"

"No—certainly—that is to say, my wife had once or twice given me a hint or two: but last night she convinced me, that after all which had taken place, it would be the most preferable step to take, both on mamma's account and our own, and I quite agree with her. Now that I am aware of mamma's injustice, towards my wife, some coldness would be certain, sooner or later, to arise in our intercourse, Don't you think cousin; that we should be right in acting thus? Oh! I can assure you Ursula said to me—First, of all consult Matilda and let us follow her advice."

"Since you ask my advice; I would counsel you to wait a little longer. Your poor mother does not expect this sudden separation, and it would be a terrible blow to her."

"Do you really think so cousin?"

"Why, would you not feel it yourself?"

"Certainly I should be terribly grieved if I were going to leave mamma altogether—I do not even know if I could make up my mind to do so but it will only be settling ourselves a stone's throw from the house, not more—"

"Notwithstanding all this, believe me, this determination would be a very painful one to her, do not act hastily—believe me—wait—reflect."

One of Madame Sécherin's maid-servants came in and said to my cousin—

"Madame Sécherin, sir, wishes to see you—and she also requests that madame will be good enough to accompany you. She is waiting in the room with the three windows."

"In my late father's room!" said my cousin, looking at me with mingled astonishment and fear, "what extraordinary thing has happened then? Since papa's death my mother never goes into that room except to pray, it is quite a chapel to her—you have no idea, cousin, how sad and frightened I feel—I know my mother, and something very serious is about to take place."

Extremely astonished at being also summoned by Madame Sécherin, I followed my cousin with a melancholy presentiment. I

I have long retained an accurate remembrance of that family scene, and it was one which I fancy must have been often acted, for the feelings which were there at stake, were and always will be essentially those of human nature. The conversation which I

had just had with M. Sécherin. proved, evidently to me, what I had half guessed before, that Ursula, far from suffering at her husband's vulgarity, pretended to share it herself in order to establish her influence over him still more firmly. The artfulness and adroitness of my cousin terrified me, I longed to leave Rouvray, I repented that I had ever come there, and a secret presentiment warned me that the visit would, to me, be a fatal one. When I remembered my childhood and the humiliations which Mademoiselle de Maran had inflicted upon my cousin, on my account, and when I compared my position to hers, I began to persuade myself that in spite of her repeated assurances of affection Ursula was too false, too perfidious, and too interested not to be also profoundly envious, I had a vague feeling that she could not forgive me for all the apparent advantages which I had always possessed over her, and that sooner or later she would endeavour to avenge herself. The coolness, the audacity which I had seen her exhibit the evening before, struck me with terror. A woman so young, so beautiful, so bold, so adroit, and so perverse, seemed to me the most dangerous creature in the world. Ashamed of nothing, daring everything, lying with immovable effrontery, and uniting the gift of tears at will to the most seducing smile—clever, fascinating, and *without a heart*. What was there which she was incapable of undertaking? who could resist her? in what would she fail? As I followed M. Sécherin to the interview with his mother I reflected on the infinite adroitness with which Ursula had prepared her husband for the revelations which Madame Sécherin was, doubtless, about to make to him.

I now entered, with my cousin, the apartment where his mother was waiting for him.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE WIFE AND THE MOTHER-IN-LAW.

THERE was something lugubriously imposing in the aspect of that apartment which had been the late M. Sécherin's. His widow, with a pious regard to the memory of the departed, had left the chamber in the same state in which it was at her husband's death. You might still see physic bottles scattered about here and there, and upon a desk lay a half written letter—doubtless the last M. Sécherin's hand had ever traced—protected by a globe of glass.

This apartment being always kept shut up was as damp and cold as a sepulchre, and the feeble light which struggled through the half drawn window blind, added still more to the desolating melancholy of the room, where everything recalled, in so striking

and so gloomy a manner, the last agony of the death-bed. I shuddered in spite of myself; my cousin turned pale and approached his mother with a respectful awe.

Madame Sécherin was, as usual, dressed in black, and she had replaced with a widow's cap the white *bavolet* which she generally wore. Her hair escaped in disorder from this melancholy covering, her grey eye-brows were drawn down with a frown, her lips were painfully contracted, and her whole countenance had a mingled expression of melancholy, pain and severity, which moved and struck me forcibly.

Suddenly, without uttering a word, Madame Sécherin opened her arms to her son, he threw himself into them, weeping as he did so, and for some minutes held his mother clasped in a close embrace

She said to him in a voice stifled with emotion—

"My son, my poor son—courage."

M. Sécherin wiped his eyes and said to his mother with emotion.

"Good God! mamma, why have you made us come here into my father's room? It brings back some very cruel moments both to yourself and me—it does you harm—it is unreasonable."

"This place, you know, is a sacred one to me, my son, I often come here to pray. It is like a holy spot—I fancy your poor father sees and hears me better when I am here."

Then addressing herself to me—

"Madame, you are one of the family, you are an angel of virtue, of kindness. It is for that reason I took the liberty of sending for you here—you have a feeling of friendship for my son, you know he is an honorable and good man, you will not forsake us? you will not be against us? you will be on the side of justice, will you not?"

And Madame Sécherin extended her trembling hands towards me.

"Madame—I know not in what way I can—"

"I will tell you everything, and although that wretched woman calls you her sister you will be just—I am certain you will—for you can have nothing in common with the wicked."

M. Sécherin looked at me and made a sign of intelligence as if to tell me that he guessed what his mother was thinking about. The latter took her son's hands in her own, looked at him with a touching anxiety, and said to him in a voice of profound emotion,

"My son, if you were to meet with a great misfortune you would come to me, would you not? I should replace to you all you had lost—you would never be completely miserable while you had me, would you?"

"But, mamma, why do you talk to me in this way?"

"Listen, listen, I talk to you thus to prove to you that the Lord never abandons those who are good and honorable—do you hear?"

If they are deceived by a false and wicked heart—they still find to console them a heart that is wholly devoted to them—a *mother's*, and with her they forget the infamous creatures who have deceived them. Courage, my poor son, courage."

Doubtless Madame Sécherin wished to prepare her son for the terrible blow she was about to inflict upon him, by the revelation of Ursula's conduct. M. Sécherin, however, appeared to me impatient at these preliminaries. At last his mother, unable to repress her indignation any longer, exclaimed,

"You must leave *her*—abandon *her*—never see her again—do you hear? That is what *she* deserves. But you will still have *me*."

"Once more, mamma, explain yourself."

"Well then, my son—"

"Well."

"My son, your wife is deceiving you," said Madame Secherin in a voice of emotion, and looking at my cousin with terror.

She expected a violent explosion, but, to her utter astonishment, she saw her son shrug his shoulders while he simply observed.

"Come, come, mamma, don't let us have any more of this, I know what you mean. You are alluding to Chopinelle? Well then, between ourselves, it is perfectly ridiculous."

It is impossible to describe the stupefaction of Madame Sécherin at hearing her son receive, in such a manner, a revelation which she had believed would be so overwhelming a one. With a mother's instinct she suddenly guessed the truth, and exclaimed. "She has been beforehand with me, she has been beforehand with me!" And she hid her face in her hands.

"Well, yes," exclaimed her son, "yes, my wife has told me that you seemed to believe, yesterday, that Chopinelle's epistle was a love letter, she told me also that you believed Chopinelle was in love with her, and that she returned his passion. However, mamma, you are mistaken—your eyes have deceived you. Give me a kiss and let us talk no more about it. Only, had I not such entire confidence in Ursula, it might have hurt me a good deal, for it would have made me suspect my poor little wife."

My cousin appeared so completely re-assured, so blindly persuaded of his wife's virtue, that his mother determined to strike a terrible and decisive blow, foreseeing that all further delicate discretion would be now useless. She raised herself to her full height, and with an imposing calmness lifted her hands to heaven and exclaimed in an accent of inspiration, which seemed to come from the bottom of her soul

"By the sacred memory of your father—as true as that there is a God in heaven—may I be punished as a blasphemer for eternity, if your wife is not guilty—"

This was a formidable accusation, so solemn an assertion had such power from the lips of a woman so pious and so austere, that M. Sécherin notwithstanding his strong faith in Ursula became as pale as ashes. Immoveable, with his eyes fixed, he regarded his mother with indescribable agony—I was as much astonished, as frightened, at the expression of mingled, sorrow, rage, and despair, which for an instant gave a character of almost *savage* earnestness to the expression of his features, usually so tranquil and joyous—

“The proofs—The proofs of that, my Mother!” cried he.

“Proofs, you ask for proofs—and I have sworn it, and swear it again by the sacred memory of your father,” said Madame Sécherin in a tone of sorrowful reproach.

“My God! My God! is it possible! is it possible!” cried M. Sécherin, hiding his face in his hands quite overwhelmed.

His mother continued.

“Yesterday I had the proof in my hands, I am quite sure, but that fiend tore it away from me, I was so confounded by her audacity that I could not speak a word—and besides that, I wished to commune with myself, and to ask counsel from God, what course I should pursue—I have thought it over all the night past—I have recalled all that I witnessed of their signs of intelligence, their manner to each other, I have prayed that heaven might enlighten me; this morning I came here, I threw myself on my knees, I implored your poor father, who sees and hears us, to inspire me also—my prayers have been answered—I feel so convinced of what I have told you, that I take a solemn oath of it—do you hear—a solemn oath—you know me—that I would die rather than accuse an innocent person, I would not condemn my soul for all eternity by such a sacrilege—Be convinced then that it is an inspiration from on High, which assures me that unhappy creature is guilty.”

“It is true! my mother would not take a false oath, she must feel very sure, and yet—Oh my God—what can I believe, what can I believe,” murmured M. Sécherin in a low tone, and striking with violence his hands upon his forehead.

His mother raised her eyes to Heaven with a supplicating air, then approaching her son, laid her venerable hands upon his shoulders, and said to him with an accent of pity and of ineffable tenderness.

“You must believe your mother, for God has inspired her, my poor child: he has doubtless chosen me to strike this cruel blow, because I can best console, calm, and restore you—we will live alone together, as we did before—oh you will see, you will see, you will not feel the absence of that bad woman—You will find me—always there—I will be much more to you than I have been hitherto, because, do you understand, I perceived that I was less necessary to you since *she* was here—*she*!—ah I dared not tell you, but that caused me so much pain! It was that which augmented the grief

that I have felt ever since the death of my poor husband—But, now I shall try to be more gay—I will be so, in order to distract your grief—I assure you of it—I am sure of it—you will see—you will see,” said the poor mother, endeavouring to smile amidst her tears. “I shall be so rejoiced to have my child all to myself, that I shall go back to the joyousness of former years, I assure you you shall never feel ennui with me—my eyes are still good, so that in the evenings I can read to you, that will rest you after your day’s work, then I will pray to God by your bed-side, and you will go to sleep with a mother’s blessing. We shall lead a peaceful and calm existence, I assure you that I will love you so much—oh so much, that you will find nothing to regret.

At this moment a door opened.

Ursula entered.

I am persuaded that Ursula had listened to the beginning of this dialogue, and that she had cleverly timed the moment for her entrance. Anticipating the result she had redoubled the coquetry of her attire.

I see her now coming in, calm, smiling, ingenuous, never had she looked prettier : she had short sleeves shewing her arms, which were admirable from their whiteness and symmetry, her dress of English muslin, very white, with a small, blue pattern on it, made rather low, shewed to advantage her charming bust and figure, for she had acquired a degree of *embonpoint* since her marriage, which had been wanting before ; her brown hair in bands on her temples, fell in curls on her neck, and set off to advantage her countenance, so fresh and blooming, a fringe of long, black eye-lashes shaded her large, dark blue eyes ; on entering she threw a furtive glance at her husband, making a sign of the head to him full of grace. The glance of Ursula was so full of tenderness and languor, that M. Sécherin, notwithstanding the agony into which he had been plunged, could not help blushing and trembling with love and admiration,

His countenance, hitherto obscured by doubt, lighted up immediately, he threw upon his wife a glance, at once fascinated and charmed, and from that moment he yielded to the irresistible influence of that seducing beauty.

I repeat it, in all my life Ursula had never appeared to me more captivating.

My cousin appeared to be ignorant of all that had passed.

She respectfully saluted her mother-in-law, seated herself not far from her on the sofa, lent her arm, so round and well shaped, on the back of it, and crossed her legs so that her dress discovered part of the prettiest foot in the world.

If at such an unhappy time I enter into these minute details, apparently so trifling, if I dwell even on the attitude of Ursula, it

is because I am certain that every action, even to that very attitude so full of coquetry, had been previously studied by my cousin, with unequalled skill. Whether by chance, or intention, Ursula was seated exactly where a ray of sun-shine penetrated into that sombre apartment through one of the half opened shutters.

I shall never forget that striking contrast.

There was Ursula, in the full *éclat* of beauty, youth, and the most charming toilette, appearing like a luminous Aurora, and rendered still more dazzling by the gloomy twilight of the rest of the apartment.

Further, in the shade, was the mother of M. Sècherin, dismally dressed in mourning—pale, disordered, and bent down with grief and age.

Alas! when I saw the choice which was to be made between those two women, one verging on the tomb, and the other in the spring time of life, I was seized with a deep sadness.

I was on the point of witnessing one of those fatal struggles so common in all our careers, which have for their foundation the most sacred of feelings and the most formidable of all human passions.

I felt a profound sympathy for that poor old mother, because she was old, and because she *was* a mother, my heart smote me with a sad presentiment. I remembered that at the very moment in which she was using every argument her heart could suggest to console her son, when she was, with touching simplicity enumerating to him the distractions she should find for him, and asking him what he should have to regret—at that moment entered Ursula, beautiful, coquettish, hardened, adroit.

Unfortunate hazard—unfortunate approach which seemed to say to that unhappy man. "Choose—you must henceforth pass your life with that woman, austere, pious, with a countenance faded by sadness and years; or with that enchanting one who unites in your eyes every charm and seduction.

Without doubt the maternal instinct of Madame Sécherin shewed her the magnitude of the danger of the struggle, which was impending.

Her countenance had till then expressed only the most tender sentiments, but at the sight of my cousin her brow grew dark, and her features became violently contracted with indignation, contempt and hatred. Stupified at my cousin's audacity, Madame Sécherin had been silent for a moment. Suddenly she exclaimed,

"What have you come here for? away with you—away with you!"

And half rising from her arm chair she pointed to the door with an imperious motion of her finger.

Ursula first looked at her mother-in-law with simple and painful

astonishment, and then cast an interrogating glance of gentleness and resignation at M. Sécherin.

"But, mamma," said the latter with hesitation.

"I insist upon her leaving the room, I do not choose this apartment, which to me is a sacred one, to be polluted an instant longer by *her* presence. She is unworthy to remain here—I insist upon her leaving the room, my son, do you hear! I insist upon her leaving the room!"

M. Sécherin made an impatient movement, and said to his mother.

"But, after all, mamma, one must not condemn people without hearing them."

"You take her part! you take her part!" exclaimed Madame Sécherin, clasped her two hands together, then letting them fall with a despairing gesture, she repeated—"He still takes *her* part!"

Ursula turning her large eyes, in which a tear was glistening, towards her husband, and said to him in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Good God! good God! my love, what does all this mean?"

"And you, madame," she added, turning with an imploring air to her mother-in-law, "tell me, for God's sake, tell me what I have done to deserve such treatment from you?"

"What have you done? you have effected the misery of my son—you have shamefully deceived him. But he is no longer your dupe, I have enlightened him, and he now feels towards you all the contempt and aversion which you so richly deserve."

At these words, pronounced in a loud voice, Ursula looked at her husband with inexpressible anguish, and then concealing her face in her hands, merely said in a tone of heart-breaking reproachfulness. "Oh! my love!"

She then leant her face upon the back of the couch, and all you could see was the trembling motion of her beautiful white shoulders.

"Mamma—" exclaimed M. Sécherin stamping violently—"why do you say that? why do you say that I feel contempt and aversion for my wife?"

"Because she deserves it. You well know she deserves it—Come—come—my poor son, let us leave her."

And Madame Sécherin made a movement as if to get up.

"Things cannot take place in this way," exclaimed her son.

"You must not accuse my wife without giving me the proofs of the fault which you say she has committed. Listen, mamma, the happiness of my whole existence is at stake, and you must be sure that I am not going to sacrifice that upon light grounds."

"Upon light grounds, my son? When I have sworn to you that she is guilty!"

"Guilty, guilty, that is very easy for you to say—but I cannot renounce all happiness for ever, because you are persuaded of a falsehood."

"All your happiness—*she* ? and what am I then to you ?" exclaimed Madame Sécherin with indignation.

"Good God, mamma, you are my mother, I respect you, I love you—tenderly love you—But—" he exclaimed with anguish, "I also love Ursula passionately, I love her as one loves the first, the only woman whom one has ever loved, and I will never—no never sacrifice her to your prejudices, if those prejudices are without foundation."

"You accuse me then of perjury, wretched son !"

"I do not accuse you—you tell me that my wife is guilty ; well then prove it to me !"

Madame Sécherin exclaimed with an accent of terrible indignation.

"Do you dare to require any other proofs than the oath I take here in the sight of God who hears me—by the sacred memory of your father ?"

"For heaven's sake, mamma, do not get angry. I should not wish to doubt your word, but after all you may deceive yourself, you may be blinded by the aversion you entertain towards my wife, and so consider, as a supernatural revelation, what is merely the consequence of that aversion : for, since we are on the subject, I will tell you that I have learnt to-day for the first time that you dislike my wife, and this now explains many circumstances to me."

"Well then, yes, I hate her, yes I despise her, because she has shamefully deceived you, because she dishonors your name. And I will not suffer a wretch like her to dishonor a name which your father and myself always bore with honor."

A few stifled sobs burst from Ursula.

Her husband, reddening with anger, exclaimed.

"My mother, you must not presume upon your position. Yet once more if you have any proofs against my wife, bring them ; here she is—accuse her. If she cannot defend herself—if she is guilty, I shall have no compassion for her. But until then—do not insult her. No, I will not suffer her to be insulted in my presence."

"Do you hear ? He threatens me—My God ! thou hearest him, he threatens me in the room where his father died."

"My God mamma, mamma forgive me," exclaimed M. Sécherin throwing himself upon his knees and seizing his mother's hand, which she drew back indignantly. All at once my cousin raised her sweet face bathed in tears. I looked at her attentively. For the first time I discovered what I had not remarked before, that her eyes tho' full of tears were neither red nor swollen, they even ap-

peared more brilliant from the tears which gently flowed from them. I should say coquettishly, when I compare them with the bitter sobs and convulsive agitation of *real* grief.

I discovered then for the first time that it was possible to retain beauty even in weeping; the most enchanting features had hitherto appeared to me always disfigured by the nervous contraction of despair.

At the movement Ursula made in getting up, her husband turned towards her.

"My friend," said she, in a voice at once firm, noble, and touching, "I will never be the cause of discord between you and your mother; I have had the misfortune to incur her displeasure; I resign myself to my fate—she declares that I am guilty—she affirms it by a solemn oath, do not do her the injustice to doubt her word. Believe her—forget me as one unworthy of you. Matilda will take me back to my father; you will remain with your mother, and you will make amends to her by your tenderness for the grief that I, alas! involuntarily, have caused her."

Madame Sécherin regarded her daughter-in-law sternly, and said—

"Do you think you can repair thus the mischief you have done to my son? he might have married a woman worthy of him—thanks to you, behold him now solitary, and yet chained for life, happily I still remain. I will console him for everything."

"Ah! do not fear, madame, I feel it here," and Ursula placed her two hands on her heart, "in a short time your son will be free—he can make a wiser choice," added she, as if she felt herself on the brink of the grave.

M. Sécherin could not stand this, he burst into tears; he was at the knees of his mother, he turned towards Ursula, seized her hand which he covered with kisses, and said in a broken voice,

"My poor wife—calm yourself. My mother does not mean what she says, do not pay any attention to it—forgive it—do I accuse you? I! could I live without you? am I not sure of your heart?"

The sincere grief of that excellent man sensibly affected me, I was disgusted with the duplicity of Ursula, but what could I do?

Madame Sécherin perceiving the sudden revulsion in her son's feelings, exclaimed,

"So you will sacrifice me to that hypocrite? so a few false tears are sufficient to make you take her part against your mother?"

M. Sécherin hastily rose and answered, with difficulty restraining himself.

"Would you drive me mad, my mother? I ask you for the last time, yes or no, have you any proofs against my wife. You believe that Chopinelle has paid his addresses to Ursula and that he loves

her, is it not so? Well, for me, I do not believe it. You believe that the letter he wrote to her yesterday was a declaration, or a love letter. Well, for me, I do not believe it. You say that my wife will cause me unhappiness, and I declare that hitherto she has made me the happiest of men; I have innumerable proofs of the affection of Ursula, of her love and her tenderness. To accuse her, therefore, I must have proofs, and proofs the most positive, of her falsehood and treachery. Without these I shall never have the courage to sacrifice my happiness to your antipathies."

"But I, I will sacrifice the dearest hopes of my heart to ensure the happiness of your mother, my love!" exclaimed Ursula with touching dignity. "My presence is disagreeable to her, then it remains only to me to take my departure. Never forget that your mother is your mother—ever since your infancy she has watched over you with care and tenderness, as for me, I have loved you hardly a year; my attachment, therefore, cannot be put in competition with hers—if I had had the happiness of having been devoted to you many years of my life, I might have attempted to struggle against the unjust prejudices of your mother, whom I love and respect; but, alas! I have been able to do so little for you, I have so few rights to insist upon, that I must submit to my fate without murmuring—Adieu, adieu for ever."

Ursula made a movement towards the door covering her eyes with her hand. Her husband threw himself before her, he stopped her, he drew her back, he forced her to be seated, and then turning to Madame Sécherin he said.

"You see, my mother, that she is an angel, not a single reproach, not a murmur, and yet you have treated her as the vilest of creatures."

Madame Sécherin smiled bitterly—"Are you so blind, are you so mad as to believe those hypocritical assertions, do you not perceive that it is because she cannot defend her conduct that she acts the part of a victim—and she wishes to depart without explanation."

"No, Madame, do not believe that, said Ursula sadly—I am silent because I respect and admire the feelings which dictate your conduct, yes Madame, nothing is more sacred in my eyes than the love of a mother for her son! if I ventured to compare the love of a wife, for her husband, with that sacred affection; I would tell you that I can enter into all the feelings of jealousy, and devotion, however blind they may be, because I am myself capable of experiencing them; one word, more, Madame, ever since the beginning of this painful discussion, Mathilde my cousin and my sister, has remained silent, you know her virtues, her love of truth; had she believed me guilty, notwithstanding the ties which bind us to each other, notwithstanding our friendship, she would have condemned me, alas! madame, I know how much she suffers in not being able to defend

me—but to defend me would be to accuse you, to accuse you almost of sacrilege, therefore she is obliged to be silent.”

“You! and you also! you will support her,” cried the wretched mother, clasping her hands with agony and turning towards me, “but it is impossible, speak, speak, that that perfidious creature may not say that your silence justifies her.”

What could I do? Accuse my cousin? never could I summon courage to do that, I could, therefore, only reply.

“Madame, appearances are sometimes mistaken, and—”

“You see, my mother, my cousin is also convinced of her innocence,” cried M. Sécherin.

“Of what use is that,” said Ursula hastily. “My cousin may proclaim my innocence, but, between your mother and me, you must not hesitate a moment—only, madame,” continued Ursula in a voice broken by sobs, “as I trust I may carry away with me, as my only consolation, the esteem of the man to whom I could have devoted my life with so much happiness, you must allow me to justify myself, may I not? You will allow me to ask you if, in the whole course of my conduct, you can bring forward a single circumstance which can condemn me, allow me that consolation, madame, for pity’s sake.”

“Oh! no doubt, you are so full of dissimulation, so clever, that you have taken good care not to be surprised, notwithstanding my watchfulness,” cried Madame Sécherin, exasperated to the highest pitch by so much falsehood. Ah! I am punished for my weakness, if I had made known my first suspicions to my son, he would have watched you better than I have done, I am old, and infirm, I have not the strength to combat with you—have you not often passed hours, shut up with M. Chopinelle, under pretence of singing together?”

“But, madame, *you* often came into the room where I was, and, besides, my husband had begged me to sing with his friend.”

“You do not understand then,” cried Madame Sécherin, “that it is precisely because I have no palpable proofs, and that, notwithstanding, I am as much convinced of your guilt as I am of my own existence, that God has given me the courage to make a solemn oath in order to convict you of imposture, condemned you effectually, and you know what you were about in risking everything to get it back.”

“Again that letter—this has not common sense,” said M. Sécherin, “to turn against my wife—a little attention she was preparing for me.”

“My God! my God! I am, however, innocent,” cried Ursula, throwing herself at the feet of Madame Sécherin, “you see clearly you have no decided proof against me. I submit to everything. I will resign my husband, and never see him again. I will leave

your house and live in obscurity, a prey to sorrow and regret ; but, at least, allow me to take with me my honour and the esteem of my husband, I ask only that, only that to help to sustain me for the short time I shall live ; you are good, you are generous, it is only the blind love which you bear to your son which prejudices you against me—only be just—shew a little pity for the poor Ursula who would have liked so much to call you her mother."

Ursula endeavoured to carry to her lips Madame Sécherin's hand. She pushed her away harshly, saying—

"Do not touch me you infamous hypocrite."

M. Sécherin could not stand this, he took his wife gently by the arm, saying in a voice trembling with anger.

"Rise, Ursula, rise, my good and worthy wife, enough of this humiliation. I am the judge—and I declare you innocent, and whatever may be said or whatever may be done, I shall always consider you as my best and most sincere friend."

"Unhappy man, this is no longer blindness, it is madness," cried Madame Sécherin, "but take care, you will cover yourself with so much ridicule in remaining the dupe of that woman, that none will even pity you."

These last words of Ursula's mother-in-law were most imprudent ones, they wounded the self love of M. Sécherin : therefore he replied with great irritation.

"Be it so, I much prefer to be an object of ridicule, to being unjust, treacherous, and wicked."

"For whom do you intend those expressions, my son, answer me?"

"I shall not explain myself, this scene has lasted long enough, it has done much harm to my wife, to you, and to me ; whatever you may say more would be useless. I am determined not to suffer any further attack, in my presence, on this angel of gentleness and goodness."

"You dare to threaten me in the house of your father—and threaten me for the sake of an infamous creature, who, at the bottom of her heart, laughs at you for it."

"My mother—do not drive me to extremities. I repeat to you, whatever you may say, whatever you may do, I shall love and respect my wife, yes, and I will defend her against all who attack her, be they who they may."

"Against me you mean, is it not so ? dare to repeat that, ungrateful son that you are."

"Well then, yes, yes, even against you, if you attack her unjustly," cried M. Sécherin, unable to contain himself any longer, "she desires only my happiness, while you try to render me miserable by persecuting the being the dearest to me in the world."

Ursula, half reclining on the sofa, hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

The countenance of Madame Sécherin took a threatening aspect, she said with a firm voice and strong energy.

"My son, you know that my will is irrevocable, either this woman quits the home of your father and you remain with me, or you will quit it with her, and I will never see you again as long as you live."

"My mother—"

"Madame," cried I, "pause—do not give way to a first impression."

"I tell you, my son, that if you will not abandon that woman this very instant, I renounce you for the rest of my life," replied Madame Sécherin, "you will both quit this house, and as I shall no longer have a child, I shall leave all my fortune to the poor."

"You think then, my mother, that I am such a despicable being as to pause for such a threat; a threat about money?" cried M. Sécherin.

"Yes, now, for that woman has made you as avaricious and covetous as she is herself, to deprive you of your inheritance is a means of punishing you both."

"So then, my mother, you drive me away from my father's house—you disinherit me because I will not share your blind hatred to my wife."

"Yes, yes, I drive you away, unnatural son, I drive you away not to have that creature under my eyes—I drive you away," here the voice of the unhappy mother gradually changed its expression, and she added with great emotion and bursting into tears. "I drive you away—My God! because I could not bear to see you continually deceived, unhappy son I drive you away to spare your seeing me die of grief."

These last words were spoken with so much feeling, with such maternal agony that M. Sécherin ran towards his mother, threw himself on his knees and cried—

"Pardon! pardon!"

At this moment Ursula drew a deep sigh, she let her head fall against the back of the sofa, one of her arms drooped to the floor, and she fainted.

By accident her position was one of the most admirable for grace and languor, from her closed eyes escaped some drops of tears, transparent as the dew-drops of the rose, her bosom heaved convulsively; two or three times she put her hand to her chest as if mechanically, and as if painfully oppressed.

I hardly believed in the reality of that swoon, nevertheless I ran to her.



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"You will kill her, my mother, you see you will kill her," cried M. Sécherin in despair, and precipitating himself towards his wife.

The anger of Madame Sécherin was renewed; she cried with furious indignation—

"She is mocking you! that swoon is all acting like the rest—do not take any notice of it—she will soon come to herself, the hypocrite!"

"Oh! that is horrible," cried M. Sécherin, "not to have a grain of pity—well then, since you desire it, my mother, let us separate for ever, after such harsh words I could never meet you again without pain."

"Unworthy son, God will punish you by your own weapons—go—I curse—"

"Madame, he is your son," and throwing myself towards Madame Sécherin, I arrested the curse which was about to escape her lips.

"No, I will not curse him—he has lost his senses—God has deserted him—let him remain with this infamous woman, the punishment is a terrible one, but he deserves it."

And the unhappy mother left the room.

M. Sécherin, kneeling by the side of Ursula, covered her hands, her hair, her forehead with kisses and tears, calling upon her name with a loud voice.

"But she is dying, my cousin," cried he, "unlace her, you see that she is dying."

The conclusion of this scene, was what might have been expected, the nervous attack of Ursula ceased a few moments after the departure of Madame Sécherin.

On recovering, Ursula burst into tears, and persisted in her determination to return to her father; it had become impossible that she could remain with her mother-in-law.

I endeavoured, in vain, to point out the possibility of a reconciliation, Ursula was determined to sacrifice herself! The last scruples of M. Sécherin vanished under that influence so irresistible with him.

The very evening of that scene, he announced to his mother that they were going to inhabit a neighbouring house, then to be sold. The separation was arranged and concluded. At the moment that M. Sécherin came to announce to me this sad news, I heard the noise of horses in the court, I ran to the window—it was my husband—it was Gontran.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## RETURN AND DEPARTURE.

I THREW myself weeping into the arms of Gontran. Such feelings cannot be described—he was returned to me safe—safe from the most terrible danger that a man could encounter.

His handsome features bore traces of the grief he had suffered. His manners towards me were full of grace and goodness—twenty times over he asked my pardon for having caused me unwillingly so much pain, promising to make me forget it, by loading me with tenderness and love. I could almost say that I ceased to regret those cruel events to which I had been the victim for many months ; so much did the darkness of the sad and gloomy past, contrast *joyously* with the *brightness* of the present.

What predominated the most in the midst of the tender emotions which agitated me on the return of Gontran, was a feeling of profound serenity, an unbounded confidence in the future ; I did not believe in perfect happiness—but I thought that I had experienced so much of misfortune, that I might reasonably hope now, that my days would glide on in peace and felicity.

Strange revulsion ! before the arrival of Gontran, I was sometimes frightened in trying to figure to myself what I should feel on his return, in thinking of his bad and fatal action ! In vain, being unable to excuse him, I said to myself that I should have done the same, I could not help dreading my first impression, but, in the pleasure of meeting him again, I completely forgot the disgraceful act he had been guilty of. I was entirely engrossed with the desire to hide from him the terrible night that I had passed in M. Lugarto's house. I was also extremely anxious to know how M. de Lancry would disguise from me the real motives of his sudden departure and return. I feared that he would lie only too well, and that would render me suspicious of him for the rest of my life.

I could understand why he had hitherto hid from me the fatal secret which existed between him and Lugarto, the confession would not have saved Gontran, and would have filled me with inconceivable terror : but he had now to account to me for a long absence and I did not wish him to draw too largely on his invention in order to satisfy me.

My fears were not realised. Gontran, if one may so speak, avoided telling a falsehood by confessing part of the truth ; he told me that

he had contracted great debts in money to M. Lugarto, and that besides that man held in his hands, papers of the greatest consequence, not only to himself, Gontran, but to the honour of a family, giving me to understand that a lady's correspondence was in question.

M. de Lancry added that to recover these papers which were no longer in the possession of M. Lugarto, he had been forced to go to England, where he had at last found and destroyed them after an infinity of trouble.

I was too much occupied in thinking in what manner Gontran would disguise the truth from me, to recollect that I had also to conceal from him some important events. Several times my husband asked me if I had seen Monsieur Lugarto during his absence.

As M. de Mortagne had advised me, and as I had already written word that I should do, to Gontran, I replied that as soon as I had received his letter, I set off for Touraine, wishing to spend the time of his absence with Ursula.

By the questions of M. de Lancry on that subject, I found that he was at a loss to account for M. Lugarto's having sent him back the forgery, which hitherto he had taken such pains to preserve.

My husband wished to know if my entreaties or my influence had had anything to do with this restitution of M. Lugarto.

I repented again having concealed anything from M. de Lancry ; but remembering the advice of M. de Mortagne, and the promise that I had given him, I remained silent on the subject.

Gontran, doubtless, feared to awaken my suspicions, by questioning me further, for he spoke no more of M. Lugarto.

The last thing that caused me embarrassment, was the circumstance of M. de Mortagne having repaid Lugarto the sums of money which my husband owed him ; as soon as Gontran, who was ignorant of it, took measures to acquit himself of this debt, all would be discovered ; M. de Lancry however reassured me, for some time to come, at least, on that account, by saying that he should defer the payment he owed to M. Lugarto, paying him interest in the mean time. These explanations given and received, Gontran appeared relieved from a great weight. His countenance expressed a sort of careless confidence, which I had never before observed, even before my marriage. It was easily accounted for ; now that I knew he had always been in dread of the threats of M. Lugarto, his evil genius. Alas ! shall I confess it ? for a moment I was ungrateful enough towards providence, to regret the shade of sadness and melancholy which grief had hitherto caused on the features of Gontran.

It appeared to me that, when he was unhappy he belonged more exclusively to me. In seeing him, so young, so handsome, so gay, so

brilliant, and now so free from all unhappy pre-occupation I felt almost fear for the future. I had already experienced the horrible tortures of jealousy ; and yet, in paying attentions to the Princess Ksernika, Gontran had only obeyed the will of M. Lugarto—at that time Gontran was overwhelmed with anxieties ; from one moment to another he might be disgraced, notwithstanding that, had he not been fascinating to that woman ? what then would he not have been, if his own fancy had induced him to pay his court to her ? I soon, however, rejected these sad thoughts as an outrage to the happiness which was restored to me.

Alas ! that fear was a presentiment.

I had told Gontran of the rupture that had taken place, between M. Sécherin and his mother, without telling him the cause of it. Ursula's secret was sacred with me, I attributed to pecuniary discussions, first trifling, then becoming more and more aggravated, the determination that my cousin had adopted of living separate from his mother.

Gontran appeared extremely disappointed that he could not, as he had hoped, pass some days at Rouvray.

That delay would have sufficed—he told me—to have completed some indispensable repairs at the *Château de Maran*, in order to render it more habitable, for it had not been occupied for some time, but the sad division which now subsisted between my cousin and her mother-in-law, did not allow of our prolonging our stay at Rouvray.

In vain, the next morning, finding myself alone with M. Sécherin, I attempted to bring about a reconciliation between him and his mother, he appeared to me even more irritated against her, than he had been the previous evening.

Ursula had continued to play her part with her accustomed skill, she did not permit herself a single word of recrimination against her mother-in-law ; she understood, she admired, she said, that jealousy of affection which could drive a mother to desire her daughter-in-law to be made a sacrifice for her.

Her husband had but to speak the word, she would bow to his decision, and consent to all he desired, she would abandon the husband of her heart, to please Madame Sécherin !

This angelic conduct in Ursula, exasperated M. Sécherin still more against his mother. *She* like most persons of a firm and just character, shewed herself more and more inflexible in her aversion to Ursula. I went to seek Madame Sécherin to take my leave of her.

In vain I represented to her how great would be her isolation away from her son, she would hear of nothing, till her son was separated from his wife.

The strongest proof of the extraordinary and fatal influence which my cousin exercised over her husband was, that I found him, who usually was such an excellent son, with a heart so good and considerate, I found him I say, indifferent to that painful separation.

He told me that his mother would become more calm, then he would come and see her every day, he was almost pleased at what had happened, for sooner or later they must have come to a separation. The accusation of Madame Sécherin was, according to his idea, only a pretence to send away her daughter-in-law, whom she never could bear "*because she loved her son too much.*"

"Yes; my cousin, that is the real state of the case," said M. Sécherin to me. "*My wife loves me too well; and my mother is jealous of her.*"

Alas! chance revealed to me, a cruel blow, and one which under present circumstances appeared a raillery of destiny.

The day after his arrival Gontran went to give some orders relative to our departure, which was to take place in the afternoon. I had availed myself of that moment to have the interview I have just mentioned with M. Sécherin, we were walking up and down a shady avenue situated in the middle of the garden.

At length my cousin left me.

When I was left alone, I sat down upon a bench placed at the foot of a group of painted stones, representing a shepherd and shepherdess, where I soon fell into a deep reverie. Such statues were common enough in gardens during the last century, and these were erected at the end of the avenue which I have mentioned. Their pedestal was large and square, and surrounded by four benches. In the sitting position which I occupied, the avenue was behind me, and I was completely concealed by the elevation of its little monument.

I know not wherefore, but, instead of recurring to my own happiness, and to Gontran, my thoughts turned to the perfidious conduct of Ursula, for since the scene of the day before, my cousin had constantly avoided me. Suddenly I heard her voice. She was talking to some one, and was by degrees approaching my seat.

A pang at my heart told me that Gontran was her companion.

I listened—I was not mistaken.

Instead of getting up and joining Ursula and my husband, I was base enough to think of listening to their conversation.

Without reason or motive; a gleam of jealousy had suddenly passed through my heart.

I held my breath, and listened with the most greedy attention.

Now that I am cool and collected I am afraid to ask myself if I was actuated at that instant by some suspicion, and I am forced to

acknowledge that I had none—my resolution was an instantaneous—an involuntary one.

I listened anxiously.

The gravel which grated under the steps of Ursula and Gontran as they walked, prevented me at first from hearing or distinguishing anything.

When they were within a few paces of my retreat I caught the following words, which were spoken by Ursula in her most gentle and melancholy tone.

*"Such sadness in solitude—for it is solitude—when—"*

I could not hear any more.

Gontran and Ursula, when they had reached the end of the avenue, turned back again, and their footsteps gradually died away in the distance from my hearing.

In the words of Ursula which I had caught there was nothing to astonish or to wound me. My cousin faithful to her mania of passing for a misunderstood and unhappy woman, was doubtless repeating to Gontran the sentimental fiction which she had so often rehearsed to me. And then—it was perhaps not to herself that she alluded. And yet I felt so painful a shock, so piercing an anguish in my heart—the future, of which but just now I had for a moment caught so cheerful and so brilliant a glance, became suddenly covered with a veil of such intense gloom, that I was struck by an invincible and fatal presentiment. "Why," I asked myself, "should I feel such deep and painful emotion at a few insignificant words? Do they conceal then some perfidiousness, some treachery?"

Still under the impression of the cruel scene at which I had assisted the day before, I tried to perceive, in the fear which agitated me, a divine revelation, similar to that which had so fruitlessly enlightened Madame Sécherin as to the guilty conduct of my cousin.

I cannot say with what anguish, what anxiety I waited for Gontran and Ursula to return to my end of the avenue. For a moment I blushed with shame at thinking to what ignominy I descended in thus playing the part of a spy, I even made a movement to withdraw, but a fatal curiosity held me nailed to the spot.

Once more I heard them approach. My heart began to beat with violence; and you might have said that each pulsation was regulated by the light and measured sound of their footsteps.

This time it was Gontran's voice that I heard.

Oh! I recognized that voice, with its enchanting tones! its expression was, I fancied, full of a graceful interest, and he spoke so low that I only caught these words,

*"Do you remember, tell me, do you remember? Oh! you were so."*

I could not hear the remainder of the phrase.

Once more they were out of hearing.

Alas ! in those words of Gontran there was nothing which could give me reason to suspect him, and yet, when I thought of the person to whom they were addressed, they hurt my feelings most terribly.

What were the recollections which he invoked ? Why did he ask that woman if she remembered. What was it she could remember ? Then I recollected that for a month before my marriage Gontran had seen Ursula at my aunt's almost every day.

Then—oh, misery ! misery ! I recollected that Ursula had told me a thousand times how delighted she was with my husband, that I was the happiest of women, and that felicity like mine was never made for her. Then—oh, misery ! misery ! I recollected the humiliation and the rage of Ursula when, after her marriage, and in the presence of Gontran, Mademoiselle de Maran had, with infernal malice, drawn out all the ridiculous points of M. Sécherin's character. Knowing as I did the perfidiousness, the dissimulation, and corruption of my cousin, was I not justified in fearing that she wished to avenge herself for all the sufferings formerly inflicted upon her by Mademoiselle de Maran, doubtless with the hope of making me some day the victim of a cruel retaliation ? Doubtless my aunt, with her frightful sagacity, had guessed, even in the childhood of Ursula, the faults and vices which would, in their development be so fatal to me, for our childish friendship, and our ties of relationship would of necessity bring us at some future day together.

These sad reflections were again interrupted. Gontran was speaking again ! and this time his tone of voice was gay and sarcastic.

Ursula answered in a similar strain, for I heard a joyous and sunny laugh.

Gontran replied. "*You will see that I am right—you will see. I should so much like to prove it to you.*"

"*Will you hold your tongue, cousin ?*" replied Ursula, in a tone of coquettish and graceful reproof. "*You are mad—it is shocking to—*"

And then nothing, nothing more : their voices were again lost in the distance.

What did those words mean ?

To what did Gontran allude when he told my cousin that she would see ? what was it he wished to prove to her ?

And she too, why did she tell him so coquettishly that he was mad ? Good God ! what could they be conversing about ?

Alas ! I remember that I was so stupidly simple as to be indignant because my cousin and my husband were not talking about me. Yes, there is so much childish egotism in grief ; when one suffers, one fancies oneself so interesting and so deserving of com-

passion, that in our mad despair one seeks sentiments of humanity even from those who inflict the wounds from which one suffers.

"Thus," I said to myself with bitterness, "what! Gontran and Ursula who love me so much—do they not even give a thought to me at this moment? And yet nothing would be more natural. Yes—and it is so natural that they must necessarily be under the fascination of some absorbing interest, to choose another subject of conversation."

Alas! I blush now at such foolish arguments, but I was beginning to find out that grief is never more intense, more dreadful, than when it inspires you with arguments so absurd, as almost to border on the ludicrous.

Once more the steps approached.

I fancied this time, that Ursula and Gontran were walking more slowly and that every now and then they stopped.

Gontran was saying in a soft and imploring voice—" *I entreat you—that, that, at least*"

The footsteps stopped.

Ursula replied in an accent which seemed to me full of emotion.

" *Do not think of such a thing, it would be too painful. You do not know all the tears which I have devoured since—But I am really more mad than yourself, you make me say what I should wish not to say—you do not deserve—*" she added speaking hurriedly and walking with such rapidity that the end of the sentence escaped me.

I felt my strength give way.

Mine was a horrible position.

I was distracted with the most horrible suspicions, and that merely on account of some shreds of a dialogue, which had no other meaning than what my insane jealousy attributed to them.

After these terrors came doubt, and then a ray of hope. Admitting that Ursula was base enough to aim at fascinating Gontran, and I might think this without calumniating her, for had she not already sacrificed her duties to a vulgar fool? admitting, I said to myself, such base conduct, still *he*—Gontran—*he* to whom I had devoted my existence, to whom I had, up to that moment, given nothing but love and happiness, Gontran, for whose sake I had already suffered so cruelly, could *he* ever have the courage, the barbarity to forget me for her?

"No, no, it is impossible," I exclaimed "I cannot have just emerged from an abyss of sorrow and despair, but to fall back in an instant, into another abyss and, a more profound one. No, no, it is impossible, Gontran only arrived yesterday, and he goes away again this morning. It is impossible that in an interview of an hour he should have tried to please that woman, and that already he should think of deceiving me, Ursula is very bold, but the worst of

women will keep up appearances ; then, in the midst of those rays of hope, came harassing doubts ? all that Madame de Richeville had told me of the egotistical and light character of Gontran, recurred to my thoughts. Ursula appeared to me more and more seducing and dangerous. If my husband were to meet her in Paris, under pretext of our friendship could she not be continually with me ?”

That idea, and the emotions I had suppressed for some moments so completely overcame me, that without reflecting that I should, betray my hiding place, where I had hitherto remained, I emerged into the alley—Ursula and Gontran were far off at the other end of it—

I saw Monsieur Sécherin join them, and accompany them towards the house.

I breathed more freely, and remained some time longer in the garden.

By an inexplicable facility of impression, the moment Ursula had disappeared ; calm re-entered into my heart, I was ashamed of my weakness, I reproached myself for destroying the happiness, which providence had sent me ; was I not going to *Maran* alone with Gontran ? the happiness which I had experienced at the *Chalet de Chantilly*, was it not about to be renewed ?—the winter was yet far off, if I dreaded the coquetry of Ursula with my husband, I could find a thousand means to draw him away from it, and at last, if I was driven to extremities, could I not tell Gontran of Ursula’s adventure with M. Chopinelle, and then he could feel for her nothing but contempt.

Before I quitted Rouvray I wished to take leave of Madame, Sécherin. I found her, calm, dignified, and collected, she held out her hand to me, I kissed it with reverence.

“ This evening—said she—my son and *that woman* quit this house. I shall live on in solitude expecting the return of my son—Yes” continued she remarking my air of astonishment, “ the day will come when my son will return to me, God has assured me so—he will leave me on earth long enough to see my child very miserable, but still to console him.” I was struck by the inspired manner in which Madame Sécherin pronounced these words, she added in looking at me compassionately.

“ You are good and generous ; you are like me convinced that that woman is guilty ; but you have not the courage to accuse her ; if you had joined me in my accusations she would have been lost. I do not reproach you for your clemency, on the contrary I shall pray to God that she whom you have spared, may not one of these days cause you much grief.”

“ What do you say Madame ?” cried I feeling all my fears return

passion, that in our mad despair one asked me to say.—nothing even from those who inflict the wound.

"Thus," I said to myself with bitterness \* \* \*

Ursula who love me so much—dephetic !  
me at this moment ? And yet

Yes—and it is so natural that accustomed tenderness ; my cousin fascination of some absorbing cordiality.  
conversation."

Alas ! I blush now at the regret,  
ning to find out that peaceful when I entered it, but which had than when it inspired of such painful divisions.  
border on the ludicrous

Once more the

I fancied this  
slowly and thus

## CHAPTER XLII.

Gontran

### THE CHATEAU DE MARAN.

you—that,

The for

Ursula

"D

not I left Rouvray behind us, I felt myself less oppressed ;  
real forgot, almost entirely, the painful agitations that I  
wi experienced, to think only of the happiness of finding myself  
r with my husband ; I had looked forward to this expedition  
with delight, recollecting the tender words and the delicate atten-  
tions with which Gontran had overwhelmed me when we set off for  
Chantilly after my marriage. I imagined there was a great simi-  
larity between those two periods of my life. And now for the  
second time I was departing alone with Gontran for a protracted  
residence in the midst of a tranquil and cheerful solitude.

This impression of happiness was so profound, this hope of mine was so radiant a one, that it predominated over all my other thoughts. I awaited with impatience Gontran's first observation, for he had been silent since our departure from Rouvray.

I found a thousand reasons in my heart, why that first observation should be one of graciousness and kindness. I told myself almost with satisfaction that my husband had reason to reproach himself in some respects for his conduct towards me, and that he would now expiate that conduct by those gentle flatteries, and those exquisite attentions of which he possessed the secret. Suddenly M. de Lancry gave two loud yawns, leant his head against one of the cushioned sides of the carriage, and went to sleep without saying a word to me. This indifference affected me very painfully at first, and I was unable to restrain my tears, when I remembered the enchanting tenderness of which Gontran had been so prodigal towards me, during our first journey.

I asked myself with sorrow, in what respect I had become less

deserving. Ought I not on the contrary to be still dearer to him ? had I not already suffered much, very much, for his sake ?

To this painful emotion, other reflections succeeded. I was ashamed of myself. I accused myself of selfishness and of a ridiculous and romantic exaggeration. What could be more simple, more natural than that very sleep for which I was mentally reproaching Gontran ? Ought he to check or put any restraint upon himself on my account ? was he not on the contrary, acting with a confidence full of security ?

I wiped my eyes, and fixed them upon his features. His face had already lost the mark of the fatigues, and the sorrows which formerly gave to it so painful an expression.

He had never seemed to me more beautiful, beautiful I mean with that delicate and charming beauty which lent such a fascination to his countenance ; and one of those half-smiles which always announce a happy and tranquil slumber, gave an enchanting expression of winning raillery to his mouth. Twice his lips slightly moved as if he were speaking. I listened with avidity, but could not distinguish the words.

When I saw him sleeping thus in his calm and smiling beauty, I felt happy in all the happiness which had fallen to his lot, delivered from the odious tyranny of M. Lugarto. Young, rich, and loved by me with an idolizing affection, was there a man upon earth more admirably endowed ? Did he not unite in himself all the advantages, all the conditions of mortal felicity ? While I dwelt thus upon his qualities, I felt terrified for an instant, we were to remain at Maran till the beginning of the winter, and this long prospect of solitude was enchanting to me, but would it be agreeable to Gontran ? I was beginning to distrust myself, and to fear that I was not sufficiently pleasing to my husband. I had already suffered so much, that I no longer felt those impulses of gentle and ingenuous gaiety with which the presence of Gontran had once inspired me. I compared what I was before my marriage, or during our happy residence at Chantilly, to what I was when we arrived at Maran, and then in spite of myself I was again the prey of foolish terrors. I fancied that I had become ugly, melancholy, and pitiable, I asked myself if I still retained qualities sufficient to please my husband during the long days which we were about to spend in solitude ; then that conversation in the avenue, which I had for a moment forgotten, recurred once more to my thoughts. I began to exaggerate my own imperfections, to disfigure my own qualities, to envy the art and disposition of Ursula, to envy also that countenance of hers by turns so animated, so coquettish, so touching in the expression of its melancholy, and its simplicity. Without indulging in unreasonable vanity, I knew that my features were more regularly beautiful than my cousin's, I knew that I pos-

sensed solid qualities, an honourable heart, an incontestable frankness, an unbounded devotion to my husband, a devotion which had already been tried and had never yet failed—I could not doubt that Ursula was false and treacherous, and that she felt a profound contempt for everything, that honourable and exalted minds reverence.

Well, when I thought that perhaps she pleased Gontran, I began to regret that I did not resemble my cousin.

Oh blasphemy ! I went so far as to despise the virtues which I possessed, and to envy the vices which I had not.

Alas ! alas ! men do not know that in publishing certain preferences—they often degrade the most proud, the most generous natures—they do not know that when one loves with passion, with delirium, one wishes to please at any sacrifice, and at any cost, and that however virtuous one may be, one sometimes blasphemes the most noble qualities as useless and vain, when one beholds oneself sacrificed to women, whose only weapons of seduction are hypocrisy, audacity, and corruption !

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, as was always the case, after these fits of despair, and implacable humiliation, which I inflicted upon myself, came a species of excitement of quite a contrary nature, a re-action, as it were of insane pride.

I asked myself in what my cousin was comparable to me, what securities of happiness she could have it in her power to confer upon my husband—But I soon fell back into my former torments, crushed as I was by the weight of this horrible reflection—what matters it, if he loves her as she is !

\* \* \* \* \*

During the journey Gontran was taciturn and absent ; I attributed this to the political changes which had just taken place, and to which perhaps he was not so indifferent as he was desirous of appearing.

I had forgot to say that on our road we had heard of the revolution of July.

Little versed as I was in politics, I felt a deep and and respectful compassion for that good old king, who was, doubtless, returning for the last time to a land of exile, far from that France which he had so much loved and which his family had watered with their blood. I had always seen the people happy and tranquil, and those who were illustrious by their personal qualities, enjoying advantages equal, and often indeed superior to those of which the

highest of the aristocracy were in possession. I could not then understand the profit and advantage of this social regeneration which we were assured had just issued from the blood-stained barricades of 1880.

I was very impatient to arrive at Maran.

Blondeau had often told me that my mother had spent two summers in this country-seat with me, and that she had accompanied her there when I was hardly two years old—my mother, she added, had never been happier than in that solitude, where she escaped from the malice of Mademoiselle de Maran, and from the freezing indifference of my father.

I was delighted to know that the château had remained uninhabited, these memories so precious to me would, I fancied, be thus preserved more completely and more religiously. Blondeau was to give me a thousand pieces of precious information about the apartments which my mother had inhabited in preference, and about the walks which she frequented from predilection. It was with a feeling of religious interest that I approached that residence, which for so many reasons was a sacred one to me. I fancied also that once there, in that spot where everything spoke of my mother, I should be under her invisible protection, that from the heaven in which she now dwelt she would watch over her child and would implore God not to inflict any fresh sufferings upon me. I had several times been able to appreciate Gontran's tact and delicacy, I was confident, therefore, of seeing him share the veneration with which that house inspired me. On leaving Rouvray I had written to Blondeau to join me immediately at Maran. M. de Lancry, when he passed by Paris, had already sent a portion of our establishment to that country-place, which was situated at some leagues distance from Vendôme.

It was a fine summer morning when we arrived. A long avenue of venerable oaks led up to the front court. You had to pass over two bridges thrown across the little river which bathed the walls of the chateau. The last structure was of brick, and consisted of a spacious edifice with two large wings falling back on either side, in the style of building which was the fashion in the time of Louis the Thirteenth. Another bridge of stone led to the first court-yard, which was closed by an iron railing running parallel to the principal building. The vegetation around the château was magnificent, oaks, Lombard poplars, and elders rose to an immense height, vast meadows extended out of sight, and heavy looking woods bounded the horizon. The steward, informed of our arrival by our courier, waited for us at the castle gate, he led us through a long gallery on the ground floor, filled with portraits. Six windows of this immense place opened upon a moat filled by spring tides,

which surrounded the Castle. Notwithstanding the heat of the weather it felt almost cold in that spacious hall. The walls were so thick that the port holes of the windows were five or six feet in depth.

Impatient to look over the house, I offered, smiling, my arm to Gontran, and said—

“Come, come quickly, I am impatient to see it all again, though I remember nothing. You have no idea how my heart throbs with the thoughts of re-visiting the scenes where my poor mother lived. And I, I must do the honors, I am so happy, so proud to have you here. Oh!” continued I with a smile. “I am the Lady of the Manor, you are in my dominions, and I shall overwhelm you with the most tyrannical love.”

Instead of sharing my mirth, as I expected, Gontran replied with an abstracted air in trying to smile and looking round him with an expression of repugnance.

“*Entre nous*, your manor appears to me in rather a ruinous condition, my noble lady; particularly if all the rooms are like this one. It is a pity that my late avocations prevented my thinking of sending an architect here; but you, my dear friend, not that I mean to reproach you, but why did you not do this? You knew in what a deplorable state the Castle was in.”

My husband had at first faintly smiled, he ended by speaking almost crossly to me.

I looked at him with a painful surprise, and I answered him gently.

Indeed, do you not remember that I was just as much upset as yourself by all the trials which have overtaken us; besides, you know that I have been very ill, and it was impossible for me to occupy myself with those arrangements. I thought that in—”

“Oh! my God!” said Gontran, interrupting me with impatience—I must tell you once again I do not reproach you, my dear, only I regret that one of us did not think of the indispensable repairs this house requires. Now it is of no use to go away. Thanks to that cursed revolution one cannot travel any where, one cannot go to watering place. In a fortnight, perhaps, all Enrope will be at variance, Paris will be insupportable. We must submit to remain here. That is why I regret that we are so badly accommodated.”

“It is for your sake that I am grieved at this want of comforts my friend. As for me, I am so happy to be here with you that I should find myself always contented.”

“You are very good, my dear! I am also very happy in sharing this solitude with you; I understand all the reasons which render this habitation so dear to you; but there is no reason why we should be deprived of carpets and venetian blinds—for I see none at any of the windows, and this Castle has the appearance of a lantern.”

"I am so sorry, my friend, but re-assure yourself, we will find means to remedy that, by having some workmen from Vendome. I will superintend and hasten them in their proceedings. My self-love induces me to wish that Maran should be the most agreeable residence in the world ; I only ask a little indulgence for all my endeavours."

"Workmen !" cried he with impatience, "it wanted only that, there is nothing so unsupportable to me as workmen ! and yet I must make up my mind to it. Oh ! that will be very agreeable—a pretty little distraction I shall have there."

"Gontran," said I, quite saddened by the ill humour of my husband, "perhaps we exaggerate the deficiencies of this house, we have yet only seen this gallery."

"Oh ! my God ! one may easily judge of the remainder by this specimen, which is the post of honor—the saloon of reception—you can see that the Steward has collected together here all the splendour of the house," added he, beginning to laugh with an air of constraint. Come, my dear friend, inspect your mansion—and try to make the best of it till these workmen come—since we must submit to have them. As for me, I am going off to see the stables, I lay a wager that they are without stalls or boxes ; and I, who have just bought a dozen horses from England, that will be very agreeable. In truth I hardly know what to think of your men of business who could let this habitation fall into such a state of delapidation."

"I am in despair about it, my friend, but I beseech you not to be angry, give me your orders, and I will see them executed to the best of my power."

My submission, without doubt, appeased M. de Lancry ; he regretted his impatience, and said to me,

"Once more I tell you I do not blame you, my dear friend, you could do nothing ; but if the stables are bad that will not be the less disagreeable, the more so because during the five or six mortal months that we are going to spend here ; I shall have no other pleasure but my horses and the chase—apropos, are we far from Vendome ?"

"I believe about six or eight miles."

"Better and better, that will be very convenient for our butcher's meat ; and as for fish, I suppose we shall have none ; it only wanted *bad fare* to complete the thing. In truth, I cannot imagine how your family could submit to live here."

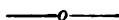
"My father very seldom inhabited Maran—My mother only passed some of her time at it, and you know that we women are contented with little."

"I leave it to you, my dear, to feed upon reveries and imaginations ? as for me, I confess to you that in the country I become

very positive and very earthly-minded ; I ask pardon a thousand times over, of your romantic exaltation, but when one has no other pleasures but those of the table, I think it may be permitted to one to wish that there should be good cheer. You will, therefore, oblige me much if you will speak to your *maitre d' hotel* to take care to get the best of everything that can be got ; if he wishes it, I will a waggon and two horses on purpose to go to Vendome to get provisions, for I cannot live on imagination—I look for the solid—and so now I will go to the stables."

Gontran went out.

This was our first conversation on arriving at the Château de Maran.



## CHAPTER XLIII.

### LIFE AT THE CASTLE.

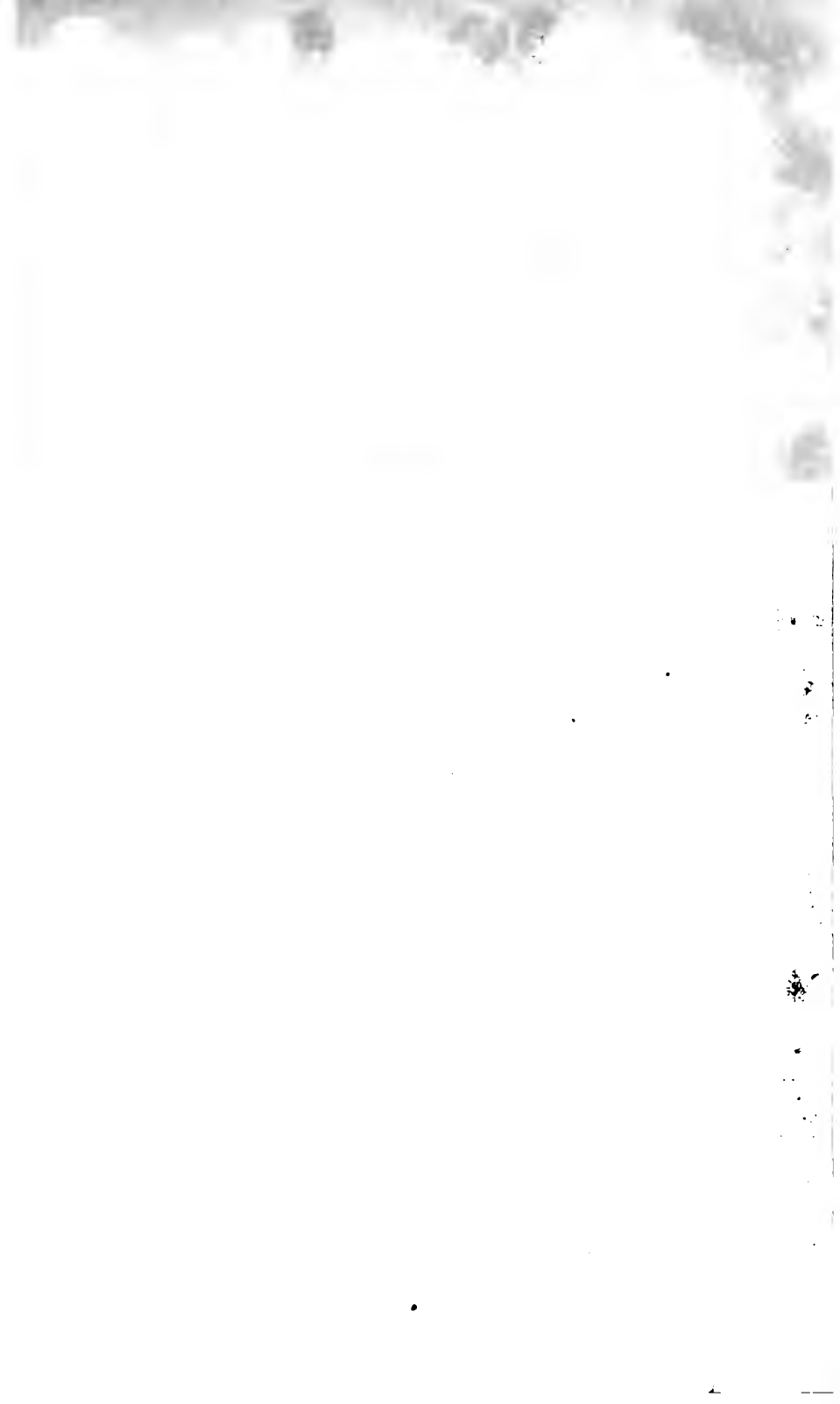
SOMETIME after our arrival at Maran, I began to feel weak and ill ; I remained sometimes during an hour overcome by some unknown cause. I soon discovered that I had made a great mistake, when I hoped that Gontran would become again all that he had been to me during the first month of my marriage ; his character seemed to be soured in solitude—and yet the life he led appeared to be one that pleased him.

Often in my presence he was pensive, and absorbed ; then I used to imagine he was thinking of Ursula, at other times that he regretted the sorrow his indifference caused me.

If I interrupted him in the midst of his reflections, he answered me bitterly, or got up impatiently without saying a word, as if I had disturbed him in the midst of some cherished reverse. What gave me sometimes a ray of hope, was the abrupt change in my husband's manner to me. Continued coldness would have frightened me more, it would have been more natural. It was a fatal day, the one that convinced me I was no longer beloved by Gontran ; from that time he did not think it worth while to keep up the forms of good society, or that respect and courtesy which all men owe to women—even to their wives.

From that time all attentions ceased, he had no longer any expansion of heart, for me nothing that showed any desire or wish to please me. A little insight into Gontran's new existence is, however, indispensable.

Since we had been settled at Maran, he had sent for hunters and sporting dogs from England. He had hired one of the woods on





Conjugal Happiness at the Chateau de Maran

the adjacent estate, he hunted three times a week, and the other three days he went out with his gun.

He rested on the Sunday, it was the only day that he spent with me. In general he went out after breakfast, and I never saw him again until the evening, on his return from hunting. We sat down to dinner; he lingered over it, spoke very little to me, drank often and shall I confess it, alas! he sometimes required the assistance of some of the servants to regain his room, which was contiguous to mine. I had always remarked that my husband studied his appearance, that he was elegant to an extreme; when alone with me, he neglected his person. He appeared to live but for hunting and for the pleasures of the table. What a shame! what a profanation! As for me, I was no longer anything to him but an instrument to answer the purpose of his coarse, and sensual life.

For a long time I suffered in silence this desertion, this change in his manners, which at least had hitherto been perfect. This retired existence upon which I had built all my hopes left me forlorn, faded, and sad. According to my usual habit, I concealed my grief in my own breast, till it burst forth; the day came that I could bear it no longer, I resolved to speak to Gontran, to tell him everything.

It was on a Saturday, there had been hunting the whole of the day; doubtless Gontran had been dissatisfied with his sporting, for in the evening when he returned to the Castle, his huntsmen did not sound their accustomed flourish. I knew from experience, that on these occasions my husband was in an ill humour; I went timidly to meet him, my heart smote me when I heard his great boots and spurs resounding upon the flag stones of the staircase.

You have not been successful in your sport, my dear? said I—

No, I am harassed, said he, as he entered a little boudoir, where I sat in preference to any other room, because my mother had occupied it; M. de Lancry threw himself upon a couch, with an anxious and weary countenance, and without speaking a single word.

His coat covered with mud, his hair in disorder, escaping from his hunting cap which he kept upon his head. I should hardly have known him! He whom I had always seen so exquisitely elegant.

"My dear, let us have dinner as quickly as possible, I am very hungry," said Gontran, turning round upon the sofa; then, putting his feet upon a worked chair, he stretched his bespattered boots upon it covered with mud.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, running up to him, "consider that chair, it was worked by my mother! take a stool I beg of you."

Gontran shrugged his shoulders, took another chair, and said to me—

"My God! how odd you are with all your affectations; let me ask you what has the memory of your mother to do with my feet being upon that chair?"

"I am astonished, my love, that you cannot understand the sacredness of recollections of the past—they are often the only source of consolation for the present."

"Oh! if you are going to enter into a metaphysical discussion, I give it up—the life I lead here is but little fitted to develop genius."

"In truth, for some time past, Gontran, you act up to that doctrine, more, I think, than you can be aware of."

"Thank God! for some time past I had been dreaming of a life, quite earthly, in which the animal, as they say, should predominate. Well, that same life, I lead it now, and it suits me wonderfully well. It is not only those superfluities of elegance, those refinements of my toilet that I have dispensed with. I was a perfect *Sybarite*, now behold me a true Spartan, a bear, a savage, I find it very convenient to be thus *out at grass* for some time—to remain a rough *chrysalis* until it pleases me to emerge once more as a brilliant butterfly. But pray ring the bell, I wish to tell Herbert (who was our *maitre d' hotel*) to put a bottle of the Rhine wine into ice—that which you have is excellent, it is *Johannisberg*, as yellow as amber. Where did your father get that wine?"

"I think I have heard Mademoiselle de Maran say that the Emperor of Austria made a present of it to my father when he was with the embassy at Vienna."

"Faith! your father was in the right not to forget that wine *here*, for it is perfection."

I rung—my husband gave his orders; he yawned and said—

"Play to me, on your piano, the overture to the Siege of Corinth, while we are waiting for dinner."

I looked at Gontran with sorrow.

Without doubt he did not remember that that opera was the one which we heard, the evening, that for the first time I found myself alone with him in the lobby; if he had not forgotten that circumstance his request was a bitter sarcasm; the tears came into my eyes against my will; I said, sadly—

"Forgive me, I cannot play that piece."

"Is it because I have asked you? well then, do as you like, play me any other, I only asked you in order to kill time while we were waiting for dinner."

"To kill time! it is then a burthen to you now, Gontran?"

"To me—not at all! I kill it nevertheless. Life never passed on more quickly with me—I had no idea before of that state of existence called a country gentleman's life. I find it quite admirable—I know not if it will continue to amuse me much longer,

but up to the present moment I am enchanted with it. Hunting has become a perfect passion with me, my huntsmen are excellent—I seldom have a blank day—Thomas is a perfect cook. Thanks to some repairs the stables are now in very tolerable order, we are pretty comfortably established in this old castle; you are always as beautiful as an angel, why then should my time weigh upon me?"

My husband said this with so much sincerity, he appeared to think his own conduct so simple and natural that, evidently, he did not imagine he was causing me any vexation; this reflection soothed the bitterness of my reproaches.

I looked at Gontran attentively, and said with emotion,

"And I, Gontran, do you think I am happy?"

Half reclining on the sofa, he answered me negligently, tapping his boots with the end of his whip.

"You—yes by my faith, very happy, at least as happy as you can be with your devil of a disposition. What can you want more?"

"Nothing, you are right, Gontran. I see you in the morning at the breakfast hour—then in the evening at table—sometimes an hour or two on the Sundays—when you make me add up the list of game you have killed in the week."

"Well, what would you more? you would not wish me to be continually pinned to your apron strings. Believe me, those eternal *tête à têtes* would soon bore you to death."

"I had asked you, love, to let me go out riding with you, by this means I might sometimes have shared your hunting expeditions."

"Pooh—pooh, you are too great a coward, my dear, and besides there is nothing so tiresome as a woman out hunting—she takes no pleasure in the thing herself, and prevents other people from taking any. If I had any one to whose care I could entrust you—well and good, but we have not got one neighbour fit to be seen with, and besides you will not see anybody; you are quite a little savage in your love for solitude."

"I should be delighted, my love, to go out riding with you—but only with *you*."

"Then, as I told you before, the thing is out of the question. How fantastic you are, my poor Matilda. You always wish for unreasonable things."

"You are right, do not let us mention it any more. I am the happiest woman in the world. My felicity ought to suffice me." And I put my handkerchief to my eyes.

Gontran considered the answers he had made me perfectly natural and not in the least offensive, he, therefore, appeared as much surprised as annoyed at seeing me weep.

"Come, come!" he said impatiently, "what is the matter with

you? We are engaged in a quiet conversation, and all of a sudden you burst into tears! What is it all about? Do you want to have a scene?"

"A scene? no, Gontran, no, I have nothing to say to you, since, you do not perceive the contrast which exists between the life we are now leading, and that which we led at Chantilly."

"Ah! there we are again—Chantilly, Chantilly, always! You have only that word in your mouth to reproach me with. Do you know that by constantly dinning that into my ears, you will end by making me shudder at the very remembrance of that enchanting honeymoon."

And he added, laughing at the joke.

"How can it be helped, my dear! *Poor honeymoon! it lived as long as all honeymoons do live.*"

"Ah! Gontran! do not destroy the only happy reminiscences which remain to me."

"Well then, do not be for ever repeating the same thing, let us reason together as friends, without getting angry; do you think I married you to pass my life at your knees, saying soft things to you? you are never content; if we live in society you are jealous; if we live alone you are exigent—which becomes at last so tiresome, that one can bear it no longer."

"Gontran, you have no pity, you forget how much I have suffered, and that I have a right to some consideration."

"Oh! my God! my God! what a disposition! Is this meant as recrimination? You say you have suffered so much, if it is on account of Lugarto that you say so, you are wrong."

"I am wrong."

"Certainly—I can only repeat what I have already said to you on that subject; if you had had the least tact or address, by some slight favors granted to him, you might have got on with him without compromising us as you have done."

"Without compromising myself—my God! you consider it then my fault."

"Well, never mind; whether it is your fault or mine; you have been compromised; and it is I, who, sooner or later, must bear the ridicule of it."

"I—I shall be blamed, I?"

"Yes, madame. Do you think it will be very agreeable to me on our return to Paris to be pointed at as a deceived husband? but, in truth, you must be mad to provoke this discussion; let us break it off; you will make me say something so harsh, that you will burst into reproaches, and sobs; and I wish rather that we should both sit quietly down to dinner."

"What you say now is horrible," replied I after a moment of

stupor, "it is I whom you blame. I who am the victim of all the calumnies of that man. No, Gontran, I know not what may happen in future, but for this evening you are safe from any scene of tears and sobs, you may dine quietly. I have cried so much that my tears are all exhausted, my misfortunes have brought me to reason, I shall not reproach you, that would be useless: I will say that I suffer, and am resigned, though not insensible to your indifference."

"Say no more, said M. de Lancry, getting up hastily, and walking up and down the room with quick steps. I did all I could to turn it off in joke, I could not escape a scene. This morning I had bad hunting, the close of the day will be worthy of the beginning. You know, nevertheless, that I have but one wish, that of living in peace and seeing you happy."

"I will thank you to listen to me, Gontran: well then, I must tell you that ever since we have been here you have bestowed no word of tenderness on me, you live with me as if unconscious of my existence."

"Why, in the name of Heaven, what does all this jargon signify? what do you wish me to say to you? if you are so fond of compliments why do you not inspire them?"

"You are right; for some time past I have been impressed with this sad truth: '*we deserve what we inspire*,' notwithstanding all your harshness, I love you always, you deserve my love."

"Well then, be reasonable, since neither you or I can alter the state of affairs," said Gontran with less anger, then he added.

"Really your romantic disposition will render you the most unhappy of women, be reasonable then. I have told you a hundred times that people do not marry to pass all their time in studying the verb '*to love*,' one marries to have a house, an easy existence to live without *gêne* whenever you are alone with your wife. It is evident that if one married to continue paying one's court it would be better to remain a bachelor."

"Oh! Gontran—Gontran. What a confession."

"You will thank me one of these days for destroying your imaginative reveries, one must be severe sometimes, it is the part allotted to us men. It is our duty to speak it to you, I am determined not to leave any foolish delusions on your mind; and once seeing things as they really are, you will know how to make up your mind to the reality which is before you."

"That is true, Gontran; my delusions once dispelled, I shall make up my mind to the reality that is before me, but it will be for eternity."

"What threats of death now? really this is a most gay and agreeable conversation, and after this you complain if I am sullen; on my return, instead of finding you with a smiling, happy

countenance, I find you sad and gloomy; acknowledge there is nothing in that to render me amiable."

"It is true—my soul is desolate, I can no longer conceal it from you," said I with bitterness, for the light, ironical tone which Gontran affected, wounded me still more than his harshness, "there is nothing I can imagine more irritating than to witness the tears which we ourselves cause to flow, but that is not my fault, I can no longer, as I used to do, smile at every wound."

"Very well then, I must make up my mind to see you always in tears; what would you have me do? Can I prevent your believing yourself to be the most unhappy of women."

"Gontran, for Heaven's sake, be just—what is my life? what are you to me? or rather what am I to you? 'Good morning,' 'Good night.' 'My day's sport has been good or bad.' 'Play me that air on your piano,' this is all you ever address to me, Gontran—this is my life, and yet you expect that I should enliven you, that I should be smiling and joyous. Is it possible? Alas! it was your love which caused my gaiety before."

"At last, here is dinner," said Gontran, hearing the bell. "I would much rather sit down to table, than answer you, because you will end by exasperating me, and I should be very sorry for that, to attempt to discuss this subject with you is like fighting against the wind."

The dinner was announced.

"Will you come?" said Gontran to me.

"Excuse me, I am not hungry, I am suffering!"

"That is agreeable, and above all it has a good appearance to the servants—" said Gontran, "however as you will, my dear."

He left me and went to dinner.

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After the departure of my husband, I went into my room and burst into tears. Nothing could soften him, I felt certain of that, he had not even an idea of the sufferings he caused me, he saw nothing in my complaints but a romantic imagination—all hopes of pity from him were for ever lost to me.

Notwithstanding his egotism, notwithstanding his selfishness he would not have been absolutely insensible to my sufferings if he could have understood them.

"If I do not address you in the same tender language as I used to do, it is because you no longer inspire it," he said to me,

This was one of those crushing truths which rose up between me and hope like a stone wall. In my despair I had not known how to reply to that sentiment, alas! I was hardly eighteen—and life was before me—my whole life.

And then I said to myself that perhaps this was but the beginning of my sorrows, that I had been wrong to complain, my unhappiness was but negative, comparing it with past happiness—perhaps in the sad days which were yet to come I might learn how much more I could be made to suffer.

I searched the depths of my heart, I asked myself if after all these cruel trials my love for Gontran was diminished—this last conversation with him had wounded me so mortally, that I felt I could deceive myself no longer. Alas ! I discovered with a sort of bitter joy, that I loved him still, as much as ever, at present I can hardly comprehend how I could entertain so obstinate an attachment, it must have resulted from the conviction that Gontran still *could if he would*, make me happy as I was before. This last hope to which I clung, was sufficient to keep alive that fatal love. A mixture of pride and self love persuaded me that I was still capable of inspiring Gontran with the same adorable tenderness that he had felt for me before, but that skill in managing it, was what I wanted.

I can only account for my infatuation by remembering that *passion is blind*, and I gave a proof of it, in persisting in my admiration for a man, who loaded me with insults, neglect, and ingratitude.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

### A GOOD WORK.

THE reflections that I made after this sad conversation with my husband, were not useless, I thought that perhaps the want of some continued occupation, rendered me so susceptible of all impressions—I renounced for ever and I confess with bitter tears, the idea, that my love could be the only, and constant occupation of my life, soon I went further still, in consequence of my constant habit of finding excuses for Gontran, I reproached myself for concentrating all my existence in that affection : I said to myself that God perhaps was punishing me for such selfishness.

As soon as that idea took possession of my mind, I believed myself saved, the past appeared to me under a new aspect, I understood how much the exaggerated romance of my feelings must have annoyed Gontran, I felt that a woman had other duties to fulfil here below, besides loving ; or rather that instead of lavishing the store of love that is in us, on one only, and adored object, we should rather bestow it around us on all who suffer in the same manner, as we testify our love to God by shewing pity and tenderness to those who claim it from us.

When that thought occurred to me, it appeared like an

inspiration from on high. I awaited the return of Gontran with impatience.

Doubtless my countenance betrayed my joy and my hopes, for on seeing me he said.

"My God! you have a very joyous air."

"My dear I have made to-day a valuable discovery."

"How so?"

"I have discovered you were in the right when you scolded me, that I was wrong to be so romantic and exalted, as you reproached me with being, in a word, that my love for you was shewn injudiciously, I have discovered now that it is not sufficient for me to say "Gontran I am worthy of you, but that I must prove it to you otherwise than by protestations every day."

"What do you mean Matilda?"

"Yes I can understand now, how much my continued complaints must have irritated you; neither shall you find me sad and cross on your return home, I will be always as I am to-day, happy and smiling!"

"So much the better, a thousand times better; but why this alteration?"

"Oh I have grand projects."

"Grand projects which are to render you happy and smiling! tell me quick what they are."

"You know well the little Castle (it was rather a large house which belonged to the *Chateau de Maran*, and where in my father's time he lodged those guests for whom he had not room in the castle) "you know well the little Castle"—said I to Gontran.

"Well what then?"

"It is completely useless to us."

"How useless? It is there that I keep my harness and saddles, and where all my hunting people lodge."

"When you know to what purpose I destine that little castle—" said I smiling—"I am sure that you will agree with me that your harness, saddles, and hunting establishment, will do perfectly well in some of the offices which are unoccupied."

M. de Lancry looked at me with astonishment and said to me.

"What—you are thinking of dislodging my people from the little Castle—you must be in joke."

"I am not I assure you."

"Well then let us speak of this no more my dear, it is impossible for me to have them any where else but in the little Castle, the garden adjoining it, is excellent for exercising the young dogs—the old kennel is very damp, and has nothing but a little dark court attached to it; so you must perceive I could never consent to that exchange."

"Do you know my dear I am almost glad that you cling to that

Castle so much for your amusements, your part will be still more meritorious than mine in the good work that I am projecting, for you will have a slight sacrifice to make, and I shall have nothing but pleasure in it."

My husband appeared much surprised.

"A good work!—a sacrifice—oh my dear do not speak in enigmas, what does all this mean?"

"It means that I have an excellent idea which you will thank me for as soon as I have told it you; I intend to found on the ground floor of the little Castle a school for young girls; on the first floor I shall have some beds placed for poor sick women, three or four doted sisters will be sufficient for that small establishment, which will be under my superintendence, and it will bring us blessings from all the unfortunate in the neighbourhood—I shall teach the children myself, they shall have half the garden to play in, and the other half shall be devoted to the poor convalescent women, will you say now that your dogs will be badly off elsewhere?"

M. de Lancry burst into a fit of laughter which disconcerted me, he said

"I think the idea is very original, there is no one but you, my dear, who could have conceived it."

"How!"

"What seriously you think that I will be bothered with beggars and children, have my head distracted by the crying of brats, and my sight shocked by infirm old women."

"Why my dear, the little Castle is far enough from us, neither to hear or see them."

"Come, come, you are a spoilt child, a little fool," said my husband with a *sang froid* which wounded me, "but speak no more of such childishness, what! for the pleasure of playing at school mistress and Lady Bountiful, you would seriously think of displacing my people and my dogs who are completely established there."

"But my dear—"

"Tell me you little capricious one, how such strange fancies could come into your head; tell me frankly?"

"Well Gontran," exclaimed I, feeling my eyes fill with tears, for I was far from expecting such sarcastic remarks; I will tell you how that idea came into my head, I have acknowledged that you were right in blaming me for dwelling without ceasing on my love and tenderness for you, and I have thought that without loving you less, I might take some better means of proving it; I believed this would be the means of testifying my affection, for it is the wish of rendering myself more worthy of you which has inspired me with this resolution—this is how the idea came in my head Gontran."

"Without doubt, the end is praiseworthy. my dear, and I can

imagine that you must require some distractions, but I confess to you that as you have associated me in your good works, I would rather chuse some other time to work out my salvation."

"But my dear—"

"Come now, I beg of you, Matilda, to say no more about this—if you were a different character I should think you must have been in joke."

"I am speaking seriously, Gontran, and it is seriously that I beg of you to grant my request?"

"Seriously Matilda? are you mocking me?"

"Gontran! what a question! and why! because I wish to associate you with a good and useful action!"

M. de Lancry shrugged his shoulders with impatience, and said to me drily.

"I have done all I could to turn off the idea in a joke; but if you force me to speak plainly, I tell you for the last time that what you ask of me is impossible, you hear me, completely and entirely impossible—I hope this is clear enough and that you will avoid the subject in future."

For the first time in my life I rebelled against the will of M. de Lancry, I said firmly "I regret much that we are not agreed on that subject my dear, but my project is a practicable one, I am very desirous it should be accomplished, and it shall be so."

My husband regarded me with an air, in which surprise predominated more than anger, and said with an ironical smile.

"Am I master here or not?"

"You are the master, my dear, I shall not dispute your tastes, leave me the same liberty with mine."

"Pash; how you run on, so what! I should leave you at liberty to throw away eight or ten hundred a year, or even more, for the gratification of a fancy which comes into your head, for you have no idea to what an expense that charitable mania would put you, to which you have so suddenly adopted—but really I am foolish even to answer you!"

"If it is considerations of the expense that distresses you my dear, do not let that weigh with you, I will economise from my monthly allowance and—"

"But I will not hear of such a thing my dear, I wish that you should appear with the elegancies which our fortune and position require, do you think that in order to let you teach brats their A. B. C. or to distribute drugs to old women, I shall allow you to dress ridiculously shabby—I wish that Madame de Lancry should be reckoned one of the most elegant women in Paris; you are one of the most charming of my luxuries."

There was so much egotism, so much dryness in the manner in which my husband made his objection, he shewed so little sympathy

for the pious and noble feelings which had dictated my request, that I was indignant.

For the first time also I remembered that after all I was in my own house, that of my father's, and that without any injustice I might spend in charity, a small portion of that fortune which my husband wasted in prodigality. I therefore answered M. de Lancry after a long silence.

"You must excuse my not being of your opinion with regard to that school, and—"

Gontran stamped with rage and cried,

"What! after all that I have said to you, you have sworn then to drive me mad, you cannot have heard what I have said to you, I tell you that I will not allow it—that I will not allow it, how many times must I repeat that?"

I could restrain myself no longer, and I replied,

"Well then, I say that I will!"

"You will! this is something new, God forgive me, you say you will, I think?"

"Yés, for I am tired of always suffering and always giving way, this language is new, it astonishes you, I can imagine it, Gontran, but this time I will not give up, what I propose is just and reasonable, and I will accomplish it."

"Ah! Ah! you will accomplish it, and how? please to tell me by what means? to whom will you address yourself to force me to do, what I will not do. Come, answer me, before aiming at such extremities, at such threats; without doubt you had assured to yourself the means of accomplishing your end. Once more, answer me?"

I was dumb. I could not find a word to say to my husband. Instinct told me that the laws and customs of society would take the side of M. de Lancry against me.

Before, however, renouncing all hope, I resolved to make a last effort in addressing myself to the heart and generous feelings of Gontran.

"Doubtless, I cannot force you to do what I wish, my dear, but I may ask of you as a favor, do not put an ill construction on what I am going to say, but your refusal obliges me to speak in this manner—and," I added, I confess with trembling, and reddening with shame, "this house belonged to my father, and—"

"If this is an indirect manner of making me feel that you brought the greatest part of the wealth that we enjoy," replied M. de Lancry with the greatest *sang froid*, "the reproach is a delicate one, and made in good taste, but it affects me but little; for a long time I have been expecting it, it is sure to come, one day or another, it is the habitual *refrain* of women, when a husband prudently and firmly resists their whims. Very well, madame,

whether this house belonged to your father or not, whether the fortune we enjoy came from your side or mine, it is of no consequence; once for all remember that we are married, and that you have given me such power, that it belongs entirely to me to regulate the employment of our wealth; you understand now, on me alone it depends whether you incur these expenses or not, I ask your pardon for entering into these domestic details, but I hope, once for all, to be perfectly understood, and that will spare you the pain of asking impossibilities, and me the pain of refusing them. In truth if one did not take care, you would make a pretty employment of your money—six months ago it was a house at Chantilly that you wished to buy under the pretence that you had passed some happy days there,”

“Ah! Gontran,” I exclaimed, unable any longer to contain my tears, stop—this is frightful, you are become inaccessible to pity! at least, in times past, your harshness used to be followed by returns of tenderness and goodness, at least you were sorry for the pain you gave me—but now—nothing—nothing of the sort, not a single word of consolation. Alas! I understand why; in former times you were unhappy, the future made you uneasy, you knew then what sorrow was, and that softened you.”

“Reproaches! reproaches! for ever reproaches!” said Gontran, raising his eyes to heaven. His voice appeared to me less angry—I began to hope I had softened him.

“Gontran” I cried—“perhaps my reproaches are bitter—but be just—putting aside some few and rapid days of happiness—say—pray say—have I not been the most unhappy of women? think of my infancy, my sad and troubled youth—now let me ask you, forgetting who I am, and considering me only as a stranger tell me—tell me should I not inspire you with pity.”

I fell back into an arm chair hiding my face in my hands, not able to say another word.

“Calm yourself,—said M. de Lancry approaching and sitting down next to me, “you are a foolish little creature, you have so romantic a disposition that you exaggerate every thing in the worst light. Because from prudence I refuse to sanction your strange projects, generous if you will! but still impracticable, you get angry—you go to extremities.”

“My God! if you did but know the thoughts which occasioned me to desire to enter on that good work,” said I to Gontran “you would comprehend my anxiety to accomplish it.”

“I understand it all my love. But come let us talk rationally. You want to spend a large sum of money, in order to set up your school and hospital. This is doubtless a noble and pious occupation which you are desirous of entering upon—well and good—but is it wise, or even humane to habituate these poor people to the en-

joyment of benefits which it is possible may be only ephemeral in their duration?"

"I assure you love, that I shall never be weary of doing good."

"And yet there are a thousand circumstances under which you must find it impossible. To mention merely one, it is not at all impossible that I may sell this place some day or other."

"Sell this place!—good God! And why?"

"The place is worth more than a million of francs, and does not bring me in more than twenty thousand livres a year, after deducting taxes and the sums required for repairs. The house is an incommodious one, the farms are scattered about, in short it is a very stupid place after all, well then! if we sold Maran for a million of francs, and placed the money in the funds, or in the bank of France, it would bring us in an annual income of fifty thousand livres instead of twenty thousand which it hardly produces now."

"Sell Maran! you cannot think of it—the place has belonged to our family for so long a period, my mother inhabited it,—"

"You must confess that all these chimerical advantages are not worth the sacrifice of thirty thousand livres a year."

"But why do we require so much money? can we not live upon what we already possess?"

"Child!" said Gontran in an accent of sarcastic pity "you understand nothing about business, one never can have too large an income. You have no idea what an establishment costs to keep up and besides I intend to receive a great deal of company at Paris this winter, and to give most sumptuous entertainments, I am resolved to prove that the revolution of July has not knocked us up, as people believe it has done."

"But seriously my love, you do not think of selling Maran! I implore you, do not do that, I have already become attached to this place."

"It is for that very reason that it will be better to get rid of it before your attachment has become stronger."

"But my love, I should not wish—"

"Are we going to begin quarrelling again? do listen to reason. How many more times must I tell you that the law gives me the absolute, do you hear the absolute management of your property, and that I can sell, buy, and dispose of your lands as I think proper! If I conceive it to be for our interests that this place should be sold, I shall sell it. And I have so nearly come to that conclusion that I cannot consent to your setting up those charitable establishments here, when they would have to be given up perhaps before six months. Let this be well understood, and I must now leave you, I am going to see whether my dogs have fed well, for they have had a hard day's work of it to day."

And M. de Lancry left me alone.

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CHAPTER XLV.

EMMA.

I WAS alarmed at what my husband had said about his intention of selling Maran, and increasing his expenditure. I felt that I was unable to oppose his wishes in any respect, I remembered the warnings of Madame de Richeville and M. de Mortagne concerning M. de Lancry's extravagance, and I shuddered when I reflected that our whole fortune was at his mercy. I was deeply pained at his refusing what I asked for in order to found a charitable establishment, but still I was not discouraged ; as I was unable to do good upon the extended scale which I had proposed to myself, I resolved to assist to the utmost of my power, the cases of misfortune which I might meet with, and to seek in the accomplishment of these pious duties, for some relief to my sorrows.

My poor Blondeau was a marvellous assistant to me, in this. Thanks to the information I acquired from her, I was enabled to succour several distressed families : God recompensed me, my sadness instead of being bitter and heart-breaking, became melancholy and contemplative, I enjoyed a kind of tranquillity and repose, and I comforted myself under the harshness or indifference of my husband, by thinking of the grateful tears which some of my benefits had elicited. I delighted in connecting Gontran with these acts of charity. It was always in *his* name that I gave alms, and I experienced a touching emotion when I heard our two names blended in one common blessing.

Several days passed in this manner, my husband continued to lead the same kind of life, and did not even seem to perceive the change which had taken place in me ; once only he said to me —“ I see, with pleasure, that you have given up your foolish ideas. You are right, the more I examine this place the more convinced I become that it will be an excellent thing for us to get rid of it.”

I had acquired sufficient experience in Gontran's disposition not to attempt any further resistance to his will, when I was aware that I did not possess the means of inducing him to change it. I accordingly made no other reply, but that he was at liberty to act as he pleased ; but I wrote to M. de Mortagne to inform him of my husband's intention, and to ask him if I could in any way oppose it. It was now about two months since we had left Ursula. One morning, after my husband had gone out shooting, I received by the post a letter from Rouvray. It was from M. Sécherin, who

wrote me word that, in accordance with the promise she had made me, Ursula and himself would very shortly arrive to spend some time with us at Maran. His factory was going on wonderfully well, and his first clerk would be perfectly competent, to look after the business during his absence. M. Sécherin said he would not let Ursula have the pleasure of writing to me and of announcing this surprise. My cousin had added a few words in a postscript at the end of the letter, merely repeating what M. Sécherin had said about her.

I read this letter over twice and could scarcely believe my eyes. And yet nothing apparently could be more natural ; we had twenty times over settled it with Ursula that she was to come and spend some time with me, but *then* I looked upon her as a friend, a sister, I remembered the few words which I had caught of Ursula's conversation with Gontran, and which had given me such a lively movement of jealousy, I shuddered when I reflected that my cousin, while she was with us, would see my husband every day, I persuaded myself that she had settled this expedition to Maran, with Gontran. My first impulse was to write to Madame Sécherin, telling her that we were about to leave Maran, and that we should consequently be unable to receive her. But I did not dare to take this resolution without previously acquainting my husband. I accordingly resigned myself to wait till he returned from shooting.

Alas ! at this recrudescence of jealous feelings, I began to regret the two months which had just elapsed. The sorrows which had darkened them, were as nothing to those which I doubted not were in store for me should my cousin come to Maran.

In the midst of these reflections I suddenly heard the sound of post horses, and a carriage was driven into the yard of the château. Thinking that Ursula, in order to prevent my refusing her offer, had perhaps chosen to arrive at the same time as her letter, I ran to the window. What was my astonishment at seeing madame de Richeville, with a young girl whom I did not know, getting out of the carriage ! For the first time the sight of the duchess did me good, I fancied that Heaven was sending me a friend at the very moment when I most required one. Experience had proved to me that in coming honestly to tell me of Gontran's faults, she had been desirous of doing me an immense service, I reflected that in the difficult position in which I was placed by the approaching arrival of Ursula, the counsels of M. de Mortagne's friend might be a great assistance to me. I was about to leave the drawing room in order to go down and meet madame de Richeville when the latter entered the room.

I thought her so changed from what she was when I had last seen her, about three months ago, that I could not repress a move-

ment of astonishment. She perceived it and said to me with her sweet and enchanting smile.

"You can scarcely recognise me, can you? Oh! I have been a great sufferer. But let us talk of you—of you," she added taking both my hands in hers.

"Maran was at no great distance from my road, so I went a little out of my way to come and give you a look. And where is M. de Lancry?"

"Out shooting, madame for the whole day." I replied to madame de Richeville.

Doubtless from the accent and look which accompanied these words, the duchess guessed that I was delighted at this opportunity of having a long conversation with her, and that I had some painful secret to confide to her, she shook her head and gazed at me with an expression of touching interest. But reflecting that she was not alone, she said to me, pointing to the young person who accompanied her.

"Allow me to introduce to you mademoiselle Emma de Lostanges—my—relation," added Madame de Richeville after a moment's hesitation.

I had not yet attentively examined this young girl. I was struck with admiration. Although hardly fourteen years old, her graceful, elegant and tall figure made her look sixteen. Her blue eyes were, if I may use the expression, of a limpid and transparent azure, her nose symmetrically straight and exquisitely chiselled, and her small rosy mouth perfection itself. Her magnificent and slightly undulating auburn hair, so luxuriant that in spite of its fineness it formed behind her head an immense tress rolled round and round—came down in bands on each side of her ivory forehead and cheeks which were slightly tinged with colour. This enchanting countenance of an oval somewhat long, realised the ideal of classic beauty. Notwithstanding the extreme youth of Mademoiselle de Lostanges, her features, her whole appearance, and her manner gave her a look of serious candour, gravity tempered with mildness and noble serenity, which was no less imposing than enchanting. Her glance especially had an expression of angelic mildness, that in spite of myself brought the tears into my eyes.

Alas! alas!—poor Emma! my sad presentiments did not deceive me—Those beings who are endowed with such perfections, that you would believe them to be of a nature superior to our own, have alone the privilege of those glances which reflect, if I may say so, beforehand those celestial joys to the enjoyment of which they are sometimes too soon snatched from earth. God does not leave his angels long among men.

Emma—Emma—my friend—Oh thou who wert indeed my sister,

thou seest, thou hearest me. Oh ! thou who passed like some divine and holy vision through the existence of those who loved thee !

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I was so struck with the beauty of Mademoiselle de Lostanges, that turning towards madame de Richeville I could not held whispering to her.

" Good God ! how beautiful she is ! how beautiful she is ! "

Emma heard me, she dropped her long eyelashes, and her young and fresh countenance became suffused with a vivid blush.

" Is she not beautiful ? " involuntarily replied madame de Richeville, in a tone of exulting pride. She then gave me an uneasy look, and her pale and attenuated countenance was covered with blushes. After a few moment's silence she said to me.

" Is your excellent Blondeau here ? "

" Yes certainly. "

" Well then ! will you be kind enough to send for her ? I wish to have some conversation with you, and during that time I will trust Emma to her care so that she may take her to look at your park which I hear is quite charming. "

I rang the bell and sent for Blondeau, who soon went away with Mademoiselle de Lostanges. Madame de Richeville could not let the latter leave the room without impressing a kiss upon her forehead.

" Ah ! poor unfortunate girl ! " exclaimed madame de Richeville as soon as we were left alone " I have heard everything ; your husband owed money to that infamous Lugarto, and the latter abused the dependent position in which M. de Lancry was placed with respect to him ; in order to compromise your reputation frightfully—a duel took place in which that wretch was wounded—"

These words of Madame de Richeville proved to me that she knew nothing either of Gontran's disgraceful action, or of the scenes which had taken place at the isolated house. I was delighted at M. de Mortagne's discretion. It would have indeed been painful for me to be compelled to blush for my husband.

" In truth madame, M. Lugarto did us as much harm as he could, but thank God he is now out of France. But you yourself also have suffered through his means have you not ? "

" He inflicted upon me the greatest anguish which I have ever experienced in my existence. "

" Forgive me madame, forgive me—perhaps the interest you felt in me has been the cause of his hatred of yourself ! "

" Why should I deny it, my poor girl ! it is true—he knew the lively friendship which attached me to M. de Mortagne, and necessarily to you. He wanted to remove me to a distance and

thus deprive you of a friend at the very moment when you had the greatest need of her."

"And you have perhaps accused me—me the involuntary cause of your sorrows."

"No, no, Matilda, alas! I was so unhappy that on the contrary I have since reproached myself with having too seldom thought of you in the midst of the misfortune which overwhelmed me—you see Matilda, I am now but the shadow of my former self—I have suffered so much, I have wept so many and such bitter tears!"

"I dare not ask you—what has caused this terrible anguish."

"Listen Matilda—May this mark of entire confidence which I am about to give you elicit in turn your own. By your paleness—by your melancholy and painful smile—I see it—Matilda—Matilda you are not happy."

I was silent and a tear rolled down my cheek.

Madame de Richeville clasped her hands vehemently together, lifted her eyes to heaven, and looked at me with a melancholy shake of the head as if to say to me.

"Alas! did I not warn you it would come to this?"

After a few moments' silence she continued.

"Really, my poor girl there is some touching charm about you which inspires extreme confidence. Before your marriage I made a very painful confession to you, in the hope that that confession, humiliating as it was to me, would, if I may say so, serve as a guarantee for the counsels and advice which I came to give you—The consequence, Matilda, was what might be expected, your heart was passionately attached, you did not, you could not believe me. I do not say this to reproach you, on the contrary it is an excuse which I find for a blindness which I myself have shared. In relating to you what I am about to confide, Matilda—I hope to be this time more fortunate—You will not conceal your sorrows from me, I may have it in my power to be of service to you."

"Ah! madame—how culpable, how cruel, was my conduct towards you formerly!" I exclaimed moved by madame de Richeville's words.

She replied.

"Cruel towards me? no—but towards yourself, unhappy girl—Come, take courage, do not despair, you see it is I now who give you consolation, and hope."

"Hope!" I exclaimed with a sigh.

The duchess tenderly pressed my hands in her own.

"Yes, hope—my counsels will give you a right to entertain that sentiment, but in order that those counsels may be efficacious, I must know everything. I will begin, and my example will persuade you."

"Do not doubt it madame, just now when I saw you arrive; I thanked God for having sent me a friend. Can I say so?"

"Yes, oh! yes, say so indeed, nay call me a mother—for sorrow has made me old indeed, and my heart is more tenderly devoted to you than ever. Listen to me then. At that morning quadrille party at the English embassy, M. Lugarto said these words to me. '*Is it long since mademoiselle Albin went to the village of Borg, to the house of farmer Anselm in Anjou?*' It would be impossible for me to explain to you how that man had discovered a secret of the utmost importance to me—I was perfectly stupified at that unexpected revelation. M. Lugarto requested an interview with me for the next day. I granted his request, burning with anxiety to know how far that man was acquainted with a secret, which I fancied to have been most faithfully kept. M. Lugarto came, he said to me '*you are bringing up a young girl under the name of Emma de Lostanges.*' This was true—I turned pale—'*Mademoiselle Albin is entrusted with her education.*' This was true also—'*This young girl has been for a month in the country, in Anjou, at the house of farmer Anselm.*' This was true also—'*I know who is the mother—and who is the father of that young girl.*' he added—then, after having enjoyed my terror for an instant, he slowly added these last words with an expression of infernal triumph '*That young girl has been in a dying state for the last three days—at this moment perhaps she has ceased to exist.*' He then left the room saying as he went. '*I will always treat as my bitterest enemies, those who are friends of Mortagne, Rochegune, or Matilda. Now that I know the mystery of Emma's birth, you know how I will avenge myself, whether she dies or lives, which last is by no means probable.*' My first cry when I awoke from the kind of stupor into which this revelation had thrown me, was to ask for posthorses. I set off for Anjou that very evening. That fiend had not deceived me, Emma was in a dying state."

"Good God! Madame!"

"M. Lugarto had discovered through Mademoiselle Albin, a miserable creature, whom he had bribed, the desperate state of the unfortunate Emma, and had made use of this terrible intelligence in order to get me away from Paris. I might be an obstacle to his perfidious designs upon you, and my being with Emma would be a proof to confirm the veracity of his denunciations. His treacherous plots were admirably calculated. I was weeping at the bedside of Emma, who was then almost at the last gasp, when my husband arrived. A separation had tacitly existed between us for several years, which M. de Richeville's conduct on this occasion will clearly prove to you—'*That is your daughter—*' he said to me. Alas! at that moment when about to see that angel descend into the tomb, I dared not, I would not lie, broken as I was by despair

and by remorse for a fault which God was punishing with such a fearful chastisement."

"What!" I exclaimed, interrupting Madame de Richeville.

"Emma!"

"Emma—is my daughter," replied the Duchess, dropping her eyes with confusion.

I could not restrain a movement which Madame de Richeville took for a reproach; she hastened to add.

"Oh! do not condemn till you have heard me. Doubtless I am guilty—very guilty—but if you knew—I will tell you all—and you will pity me—I am sure you will. After this confession, M. de Richeville said to me at the bedside of that expiring girl, "I have squandered all my fortune, you have still left an income of a hundred thousand livres a year, give me a million of francs, or I will commence a suit against you for a separation; and will make a most horrible scandal. I have in my possession all the letters which prove that Mademoiselle de Lostanges is your daughter, that she was born during my absence in Italy. Nor is this all, I have also all the letters that you wrote to M. de Lancry."

"Ah! Madame," I exclaimed, blushing deeply, "it is M. Lugarto only, who abusing the influence he possessed over my husband forced him to deliver up the letters."

"I do not doubt it. I believe M. de Lancry incapable of having voluntarily committed so infamous an action. What can I say, Matilda? distracted, half mad with grief, terrified at the threatened exposure of a law suit which would dishonour me, of a law suit which would deliver up to the sarcasms of the world a memory sacred in my eyes—the memory of Emma's father."

"He is not alive then, madame?"

"No, he has been dead these six years," said Madame de Richeville, pressing her hands to her forehead with painful emotion. She then continued.

"With so many reasons to dread the scandal with which M. de Richeville menaced me if I refused to comply with his wishes, I consented to every thing. With admirable foresight," added the Duchess with a bitter smile, "my husband had brought one of his agents with him; the acts were all duly prepared. There, close to my daughter's bed, I signed the deed which deprived me of half my fortune. In exchange for this donation, M. de Lancry's letters, and those which related to the birth of Emma were restored to me and thank God my husband is now without any weapons in his power against me."

"Oh! how miserably base," I exclaimed, "to come and dictate such conditions near a death bed!"

"And now, Matilda," said Madame de Richeville. "I have confessed to you the only two errors which I ever committed. Many

scandalous adventures have been attributed to me, and yet before that God of sovereign goodness, who restored my daughter to me, I swear to you, Matilda—never did I give reason for the calumnies which have overwhelmed me. I do not pretend to deny my errors, they have been great, but if you knew that married when I was scarcely sixteen to M. de Richeville, I was after a few months of marriage, contemptuously and brutally sacrificed, and to what creatures, oh my God! For four years my success in society was sufficient to console me for my husband's neglect; during those four years of intoxication; or rather of mad excitement, my heart slumbered, I loved no one, but I knew not one instant of *ennui*; by degrees, however, I became weary of those continual *fêtes* and of that noisy and dimless existence. My husband had set off for Italy, where he remained for two years. I was alone—free. I became a prey to profound melancholy. For the first time the pleasures of the world were no longer sufficient for me. What shall I tell you, Matilda! at that time, I met the father of Emma in society. The passionate love I conceived for him, though long resisted, made me forget my duties. If a fault *could be* excused or ennobled by the merits of him who makes you commit it, my love was indeed excusable, for he to whom I was attached united in himself the most rare qualities and fascinations. This passion so profound on my part, and so fully shared by him, lasted for six years, and was scarcely guessed at in the world, for I spent, the greater part of that period in one of my country seats. Death deprived me of him whom I adored. After that terrible blow I remained for several years the prey to alternating and strange revulsions of feeling, sometimes remaining for whole months together plunged in despair, at others wishing to struggle against the grief which was consuming me, I gave myself up with ardour to every kind of pleasure, and accepted with a kind of absent coquetry, innocent enough I swear to you, but a thousand times more compromising than many errors, the homage, the attentions of all, for my heart always remained cold and dead to the emotions of love; and then when those men whose attentions I had admitted with so much indifference, fancied themselves beloved and asked me for some serious proof of my affection, I could scarcely understand them, I fancied I was awaking from a dream, and I became indignant at their pretensions. It was their spite, their hatred, when they found themselves disappointed in the hopes which I had unfortunately encouraged, that kept up the abominable calumnies of which I was the prey, and to which you have heard mademoiselle de Maran make such cruel allusions. Then, seeing myself unjustly attacked, indignant at the malice of the world, I sought for a refuge in prayer: unable to feel anything without exaggeration, I devoted myself to the most rigorous austerities, I wore a hair cloth shift next to my skin, I lived for whole

months in the most profound solitude, but it was in vain that I implored God to give me peace, God would not hear me, in His eyes there was nothing but impiety in those desperate, those impetuous fits of prayer to which I only gave myself up from unhealthy excitement, and as it were to avenge myself for the calumnies which the lightness of my conduct had provoked. After so many struggles, after so many bitter deceptions, I sought for a last consolation in love, or rather I hoped to bring the past once more to life, that past which had been so dear to me.

"Alas! that was my great fault, I madly thought that it was possible to love twice. Instead of preserving in my heart a precious and holy memory, I blackened that first, that only love! Parading as it were the impetuous bursts, the devotion, the enthusiasm of that first attachment, I loved, or rather fancied that I loved M. de Lancry. I soon perceived the error into which I had fallen, and I shed some bitter tears o'er this last fault which had proved so useless a one for my happiness. I do not wish, Matilda, to justify M. de Lancry's odious conduct towards me, but perhaps he perceived the lukewarmness of my affection, though I devoted myself to him unboundedly: every day I was forced to acknowledge with intense anguish that we can love but once, and even if a second attachment had all the vivacity of the first, it would still be never anything but a mere repetition, a reflection, an echo. After the breaking off my connection with M. de Lancry—a last and fatal experience! I returned into society, but with no feeling of interest in its gaieties, and continually thinking of my daughter whom the respect due to worldly decorum forbade me to have at my side; it was then that I heard of Emma's illness: a woman in whom I had perfect confidence, mademoiselle Albin, (whom I had placed as governess with my daughter) had been corrupted by the bribes of M. Lugarto."

"How infamous!"

"She sold him the letters in which I had always kept up a correspondence with her, as well as all the documents which related to the birth of Emma, and which I had confided to her; the frequent voyages of M. de Mortagne not having allowed that excellent friend to take charge of the deposit. When my husband had extorted that last confession from me, I made a vow at the bed-side of my dying daughter that, if God would restore her to life, I would forsake the world for ever, and spend the end of my days in some retreat which should embrace all the strictness of a religious retirement. God took compassion upon me, he preserved Emma, and since that vow which I have taken, the calm which I enjoy is indescribable. Henceforth my existence will be divided between my daughter and the practice of that religion of which I now begin to feel the infinite sweetness. I am so happy, Matilda, at the prospect of this futurity, so happy that I tremble lest some

new calamity should arise to overthrow it—you know I have been too guilty to have any right to such felicity," added madame de Richeville with a deep sigh.

"Ah! do not believe that, madame, God forgives so much to repentance."

"May he listen to you, Matilda."

"And where are you now going to, madame?"

"To Paris, I shall retire to the convent *du Sacré Cœur*, where I am going to take Emma. She will pass for an orphan distantly related to me. The superior of the convent will give me up a little apartment in that holy residence, and it is there that I shall henceforth live. When Emma is old enough to be married, I shall entreat M. de Mortagne, and you, Matilda, you who now know the melancholy secret of her birth, to seek for some man too generous to make that poor girl responsible for the fault of her mother. I shall resign the remainder of my fortune to her, with the exception of a modest pittance for myself, I shall consecrate the remainder of my life to the expiation of my errors, and God perhaps will fulfil the prayers which I shall offer up for the happiness of my daughter."

There was so much simplicity in the words and in the confession of madame de Richeville, the resolution she declared was so firm and sincere a one, that I was deeply moved.

I was touched also at seeing her, so beautiful, and still so young, for at the most her age did not exceed thirty four or thirty five years, about to give herself up to a profound retirement, about to renounce a world to which she was still fitted to be so brilliant an ornament.

"Ah madame," I said to her "how would it be possible that God should not take pity and compassion upon you?"

"He *has* already shewn so much mercy in restoring my daughter to me, and in conferring upon her such admirable gifts! for you have no idea of that girl's adorable qualities, if you knew what a heart, what a soul, what an enchanting intellect she possesses. No, I am not blinded by maternal love," said the duchess unable to restrain her tears "it is impossible to meet with more goodness joined to more nobility of disposition, to more uprightness, and then her sensibility is so expansive, so sincere! Believe me, her very soul may be read in her angelic looks, and then—but, forgive me, forgive me, Matilda, excuse a poor mother, but I so seldom find an opportunity of saying those blessed words *my daughter*, that I am abusing—"

"Ah! can you believe it, madame? do you think that I do not feel how painful to you must be that constraint which you are compelled to place upon yourself?"

"Yes—oh, yes—very painful, Matilda, especially when I am alone with Emma, although I overwhelm her with tenderness,

although she is fondly attached to me, alas! she does not know, she never will know that I am her mother—I fancy that if she knew it she would love me in a different manner, I fancy that her voice would have a different accent, her eyes a different glance, I am to her but a distant relation whom she has rarely seen; what would it be then if she knew that I am her mother? Sometimes I am on the point of confessing everything to her, but shame restrains me. Never will I expose myself to blush before that angel. But once more, forgive me, Matilda, for talking to you so much about myself. Now that you know the history of my life you will imitate my confidence. Now, Matilda, let us talk of yourself. I implore you, conceal nothing from me. Believe me, experience in misfortune ripens the judgment, and my counsels may be serviceable to you.”

After a moment's hesitation. I told Madame de Richeville all the reasons I had for being jealous of Ursula, my suspicions as to the latter's intrigue with M. Chopinelle, what I had caught of her conversation with my husband, and, in conclusion, my apprehensions at the approaching arrival of my cousin.”

Madame de Richeville said to me.

“Matilda you still love your husband passionately. So much the better, a love like yours is a holy and a noble thing, doubtless one suffers, but the heart at least is full, and that feverish and uneasy ardour is better than a vacuum and stagnation of the soul. Your cousin seems to me a very dangerous person. In former times mademoiselle de Maran always exalted you at Ursula's expense with a maliciousness that was profoundly calculating. She knew that women of that description never forget, and that with them the wounds inflicted on their pride are incurable ones. Ursula will endeavour to avenge herself upon you for the humiliations of her childhood, for the ridiculous qualities of her husband, for the as ridiculous qualities of her first lover. Fatality has made you a witness to many scenes of which she is ashamed, and she will never forget it. Consider her then in the light of your most mortal enemy. Your conduct towards her has been perfect in its tenderness, and the wicked never forgive the benefits they have received.”

“And yet she is coming to declaim to me again about her *friendship*—the hypocrite! Never, oh! never will I permit it.”

“Matilda, you know the intractable disposition of your husband, if he chooses you to receive your cousin, you will be obliged to obey him.”

“Oh! never, never.”

“Poor girl, what will you do?”

“I will implore Gontran, he will see my tears, he will take com-

passion upon me, for I am sure if she comes here I shall have an illness."

"M. de Lancry will not have compassion upon you, Matilda, for like you, I believe that this expedition is a planned thing between him and Ursula."

"You believe then that he loves her?"

"As much as he is capable of loving anything. From what you have told me, I do not doubt that your cousin practised the most barefaced and encouraging coquetry towards him. They were not long without understanding each other perfectly, and had not chance allowed you to catch some words of their conversation, your suspicions would never have been awakened."

"But what shall I do, good God! what shall I do? When once my cousin is here, Madame, my misery will be certain. All Gontran's attentions will be for her, and my life will become a torture of every instant."

"Do not think that, on the contrary, if you follow my advice, Ursula will only stop a few days at your house, and during that time she will repulse the slightest attentions of your husband."

"What do you say, Madame?"

"Listen to me, Matilda. Your cousin, that melancholy and romantic personage is above all things anxious to retain the influence she exercises over her husband. Nothing costs her too much in order to secure that influence; she flatters his vulgarity; shares, and even exaggerates it, which is natural enough. Ursula is vain, greedy, and poor, she forces her husband to wear himself out with business, in order that she may soon be in a condition to lead a life of opulence at Paris. Were M. Sécherin to know to-morrow that Ursula deceives him, to-morrow he would forsake her, and Ursula would become poor once more, with no other resource but her dowry. She married in order to become rich, and she will sacrifice a great deal, if not all, to the preservation of that fortune."

"Ah! madame! her husband loves her so much! he is so good! so weak!"

"From what you have told me of him, he is as courageous as he is upright and devoted, and such dispositions never enter into a compromise with honour or descend to cowardly complaisance. He adores his wife; from the moment he discovers that she dishonours him, he will abandon her, he will be terribly miserable, perhaps, but he will never see her again."

"Do you advise me to denounce Ursula?" I exclaimed.

"I advise you, my dear girl, to wait for your cousin, here, and on the very day of her arrival to say to her with calm firmness, "Your visit to Maran is a planned scheme between yourself and my husband. I am not your dupe: I declare to you that I am determined to resort to every possible means in order to keep you at a distance from

my house. I cannot prevent M. de Lancry's being led away by your coquetry, but I will not suffer you to come here and defy me. You possess complete influence over M. Sécherin, it will be very easy therefore, for you, in five or six days, to persuade him to go away from here under the pretext of a coolness between me and you, for which I will take care to furnish you with a very natural opportunity. If you refuse this, to-morrow I will go to your husband, and I will frankly confess to him, that right or wrong, I am jealous of you, and that I implore him to take you away. Make up your mind then whether you grant me with a good grace, what otherwise, I can obtain by different means."

"Speak to her in that way, Matilda, and I swear to you that she will not hesitate to depart. She will fear—and with reason—that the suspicions of her husband once awakened, he will lose that blind confidence on which depend all the power, all the courage, and all the future projects of your cousin."

I had listened attentively to Madame de Richeville, and what she said to me seemed correct and just. A thousand forgotten circumstances returning to my memory, proved to me that the Duchess had formed a marvellously correct estimate of Ursula's character. Only, I confessed to her that I dreaded the brazen assurance of which my cousin had given me so many proofs.

"It is for that very reason that I particularly wish to impress upon you, Matilda, the necessity of never entering into any discussion with her; stick to this one declaration. 'Leave my house, or I will unmask you to your husband—' not another word more or less."

"Ah! Madame, it is very cruel!"

"No weakness, Matilda; or all will be lost."

"Alas! madame, if Gontran no longer loves me, he will sacrifice me to some other woman, as well as to Ursula," I said with despair.

"My poor girl, we must always in this life begin by securing to ourselves all the repose and happiness to which we can form any just pretension. Ursula once away, you will be quiet here till the winter, and that at all events will be so much gained: when you have returned to Paris, if her coquetry still give you reasons for alarm, you must have recourse to the same threats. I conceive that your generous nature recoils from this mode of proceeding—but you will have no need to resort to extreme measures. Believe me, this simple menace of yours will suffice to make your cousin give up her projects of seduction. She will have too much horror of becoming poor again by her husband's desertion; to place you under the necessity of ruining her. Women like her are incapable of a sacrifice; even where their evil passions are concerned."

Madame Blondeau's return, who now re-entered the room with Emma, put an end to our conversation. Emma ran up to her

mother, and embracing her, presented the Duchess with a large nosegay of roses. Her walk had given a most fresh and enchanting colour to her complexion. She came and sate down for a minute, on a sofa in the drawing-room, between myself and the Duchess. Madame de Richeville, placed the nosegay upon her knees, took of Emma's hands in one of her own, and with the other arranged the bands of her daughter's fair hair, which had been somewhat disordered by the walk.

While we three were thus together, Emma, her mother, and myself, I reflected—alas! with bitterness reflected—that I no longer possessed the confiding security of that young girl, while I had not yet attained the melancholy resignation, which sorrow had bestowed upon her mother.

I thought of all the sufferings I should have to go through before I could arrive, like Madame de Richeville, at the abandonment of all human hopes. A woman's age for *action*—if I may use such an expression—extends mostly from fifteen to thirty. Emma, myself, and Madame de Richeville, united among us, those three periods of existence, the innocent and pure tranquillity, the stormy whirlwind of the passions, and the prostration which succeeds to them, when the heart lacerated in the struggle seeks for repose in oblivion.

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Madame de Richeville was unwilling to meet Gontran, and left me towards evening. She had received no intelligence of M. de Mortagne, and he had not answered the letter which I had written to him about my husband's intention of selling Maran.

I felt somewhat uneasy, and Madame de Richeville promised to write to me as soon as she had arrived at Paris, in order to re-assure me on this point. She strongly impressed upon me, also, the necessity of giving her every information of what took place at Maran, when Ursula arrived, and to remember strictly the advice which she had given me.

I parted from this excellent friend with a painful depression of heart.

That evening, when Gontran came in from shooting, I informed him of Madame de Richeville's visit; he seemed not to care much for the intelligence, and I then gave him M. Sécherin's letter, announcing the approaching arrival of my cousin. M. de Lancry answered with the utmost coldness that he was delighted to hear it, because Ursula would keep me company.

Four or five days after my interview with Madame de Richeville, Monsieur and Madame Sécherin arrived at Maran.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## THE TWO FRIENDS.

URSULA threw herself into my arms and embraced me most affectionately. I replied to these evidences of friendship with much coldness ; my cousin, however, did not perceive, or pretended not to perceive, how little warmth there was in the reception I gave her.

After the first compliments, M. Sécherin said to me with a sigh, and looking at his wife.

"Well, cousin, the day after your departure a separation took place between us and mamma, and we have left Rouvray. Alas ! yes, you have no idea, cousin, how much it cost my wife to take this step. She was quite heart-broken about it, which proves what a good heart she has, for I must say mamma had been very harsh and very unjust towards her. But how can it be helped ? when once old people get a thing into their heads, the devil himself can't get it out again."

"Are you still living in the neighbourhood of Rouvray ?" I said to him, "in order to see your mother and superintend your manufactory ?"

"Yes, certainly, cousin, I have often seen my mother, who is very well, and, as my wife observes, I am sure mamma likes this arrangement much better now that the thing is done ; she is more independent, and so are we also. But she never would receive Ursula ; how could it be helped ; it was an idea she had got into her head. My wife cried a good deal about it. I can tell you ! However, it don't signify, there is something else in the wind ; my manufactory don't want any more looking after ; and altogether I have now sixty eight thousand livres a year—and upon my word Ursula and I want to enjoy life a little. You don't know our project, do you ?"

"No, indeed, my dear cousin."

"My dear," said Ursula, "You are going to be indiscreet, I implore you to—"

"Indiscreet with our good cousin !" exclaimed M. Sécherin, interrupting his wife, "how could that be possible ? isn't she your sister, the best friend your ever had in your life ? And besides I am sure that what I am going to propose to our cousin, will give her real pleasure since it pleases us. In one word, *Madame la Vicomtesse*, when you married, you offered to let us have a suite of rooms in your *hôtel*, at Paris ; which is too large for your own occupation. Well then, we accept your offer.

I looked at Ursula with as much surprise as indignation ; she did not appear to understand me, and gave me a tender smile while M. Sécherin went on.

"Do you remember what you used to say to us, cousin. "Come to Paris and we shall all be like one family—the winter at Paris; the summer at Maran or at Rouvray?" "Well then! these fine plans which are so delightful to you and to us also, are going to be realised—we shall not be separated any more. I shall go and see mamma every year, and leave Ursula with you. I have had a little snuggerly prepared for me at my factory; and now we are come to ask your hospitality till we all set off together for Paris. In order not to leave my time and capital unoccupied, I shall take a share in a banking house belonging to one of my friends; a house that is perfectly safe since it has survived the revolution of July. That will give me some occupation while I am at Paris. Only, a short time hence I shall leave you, to take a little trip—as far as a farm I am offered for sale, and which I want to look at. During that time you and Ursula can settle everything about our establishment at Paris; you may as well let your rooms to us as to strangers, eh? cousin? But, by-the-bye, no—no—women understand nothing about business. I will arrange everything with M. de Lancry. Well, cousin, confess you did not expect this—and that we have been preparing a rare surprise for you?"

M. Sécherin, was not at all clear sighted, and did not, accordingly, perceive my stupefaction.

My position was by so much the more painful, that, in former times when I had a blind confidence in Ursula's friendship, I had actually made her this very proposition, and had implored her to accept it.

Interpreting my silence after his own fashion; M. Sécherin exclaimed.

"Well! you can't get over it! I was sure you would not think we were capable of such a thing."

"Indeed, my cousin, I was far from hoping—"

"That we should remember your kind offers, my good Matilda. Ah! the very doubt was an injustice, first to me, and then to my husband," said Ursula, with an accent of graceful reproach.

Not wishing to come to any violent explanation, before the conversation which, following Madame de Richeville's advice, I was desirous of having with my cousin, I replied with some embarrassment.

"Certainly, I *did* hope for this piece of good luck, my dear cousin; but I did not think of seeing my hopes realised so soon, and I am enchanted at the flattering taste you have displayed."

"And I believe it, cousin, because you say it—Oh! I know you well, you are not one of those women who say yes, when they mean no. Mamma was always repeating to me, "Madame de Lancry is

truth and honour personified, what she says is gospel." Wasn't she, Ursula?"

"Certainly, my dear, but your mother, in saying that, thought as I do."

"Yes, that's true enough—Oh! take my word for it, cousin, you have no friend—what do I say? no *sister* more devoted than my wife. It is Matilda here, and Matilda there—nothing will go down but Matilda. In short, particularly since the little visit you paid us at Rouvray, she is as frantic as the deuce to come and live with you. You may guess how well this suits me, me who also swear by nothing else than you, without, however, forgetting my cousin Lanery. Ah! cousin, as folks say, there are two of you to the pair. You were born for M. de Lancry as M. de Lancry was born for you. It is just like me, without vanity, I was born for Ursula as Ursula was born for me. But it is true enough, great gentlemen are made for great ladies, like you," added M. Sécherin with a loud laugh, "and nice little homely women, like Ursula, are made for plain homely fellows like myself."

"I am not of your opinion, cousin; there are none of these distinctions between Ursula and me, are we not relations?" I said, seeing that the conversation was taking a disagreeable turn, and that M. Sécherin was inflicting a deep wound on his wife's pride.

Unluckily, when my cousin was bent upon following out an idea, it was impossible to get him away from it. Accordingly he went on,

"You do not understand me, cousin, I am not talking of birth. I know well enough that my wife's family is noble and that I am nothing but a plain citizen; but I affirm that you and your husband have something imposing and superior about you both, which neither I or Ursula possess, and for my part I am enchanted that it should be so, yes! enchanted. Do you think if my wife had had your fine, princess-looking air, I should have talked to her so familiarly as I did the day we were married? I should just like to have caught myself at it. On the contrary, Ursula with her nice merry little face, which by-the-bye I dote on more and more every day, put at my ease at once, I called her '*dear*,' she called me '*love*,' and we were good friends in an instant. Between you and her, in short, there is that difference that—"

"Oh! I will not allow you to go any farther," I said to M. Sécherin, "do not attempt to give us an account of the various impressions you experience, but be satisfied with experiencing them. You are passionately attached to Ursula, and that is why you and she understand each other so well, why you see—and with reason—in *her* the gracefulness and charms which attract, while you think there is a look of imposing dignity about me, in a word you *love* her, while you feel for *me* a frank and sincere

friendship—that is all the difference.”

“It is prodigious how cleverly you account for everything!” exclaimed M. Sécherin. “Ah! talking of what is prodigious” he continued, “I am going to surprise you finely, just fancy my having taken to riding!”

“Indeed! how did that happen?”

“Another proof of my husband’s devotion to me” said Ursula. “After you had left us, my good Matilda, my doctor ordered me horse exercise, and M. Sécherin was good enough to send for a riding master from Tours, and to take lessons with me, so that he might be able to accompany me in my rides.”

The idea immediately struck me, that Ursula had learned to ride in order that she might, when once at Maran, manage a *tête à tête* with my husband, when she wished, for since our arrival Gontran had always refused to allow me to accompany him on horseback.

“And you cannot imagine” continued my cousin “with what ardour and courage Ursula used to take her lessons. What had been prescribed for her health became a matter of real pleasure to her, she used to ride two or three times a day in a meadow which belonged to the factory, and which seemed to have been expressly created for that. She was so bold, so intrepid that the riding master declared he never had such a promising pupil.”

“Oh! my dear! you exaggerate,” said Ursula modestly.

“Exaggerate do I? well then! I will lay a wager that Ursula could ride any one of M. de Lancry’s horses,” exclaimed M. Sécherin, “but as for myself, I could not say as much—Nor you either cousin; for I fancy you are no great performer on the saddle.”

“No cousin: but it would be very imprudent for Ursula to attempt to ride one of M. de Lancry’s horses; not one of them has been broken in to carry a lady—and it would be a dangerous experiment for her.”

“Dangerous! Ah! you don’t know what she can do! dangerous—do you suppose she is afraid of anything? Ah! if you could once see her on horseback, she looks so nice, and then her *amazone* becomes her so well! and sets off her figure to such advantage! It quite turns my head to look at her. You’ll shew your *amazone* to our cousin won’t you?”

“You know my dear, people say a riding habit, not an *amazone*,

“True, true, you told me so before—I had forgotten it. Oh, a’nt you just such another as mademoiselle de Maran! a’nt you that’s all? a’nt she cousin?”

“My good Matilda cannot be angry with me for thus slightly correcting you, my dear, for she herself strongly impressed upon me always to tell you what was the proper, and what the improper method of expressing oneself—did you not, my sister?”

"Yes, yes," I replied absently. My heart was breaking, and I was suffering all the tortures of jealousy and—shall I own it? of envy. I fancied I already saw Ursula with all her coquetry, all her boldness, and all her impetuosity, riding by Gontran's side, and setting off on long expeditions with him; while I—I—was left behind alone—"No, no," I said to myself trembling with anger, "it shall not be. Ursula *must* depart and I will follow the counsels of madame de Richeville."

At the very instant when I was absorbed in these bitter reflections, Ursula said,

"It will soon be dinner time, my dear Matilda, will you be kind enough to send for my maid, to shew us our apartment?"

"Oh yes, and mind you make yourself look pretty, you have brought such charming dresses with you, just fancy cousin," said M. Sécherin, "she had so many trunks and handboxes that I was obliged to buy a waggon at Tours to bring them all in, including Célestine, mademoiselle Célestine, I mean, such a lady's maid as you don't often see I believe, and whom my wife has had down from Paris. I must confess that her way of dressing the hair is perfection itself."

These preparations for coquetry on the part of Ursula increased my suspicions still more, and I could not help saying to her with some bitterness.

"God bless my soul, what have you made so many preparations for, just to come and spend a short time with us who never see anybody? Why really one would say you have some mighty projects of conquest, I can't think whom you mean to seduce here. I am really beginning to feel quite uneasy," I added with emotion in my voice, yet attempting to smile while I spoke.

Ursula made no reply, but with a slight movement of her head full of charming coquettishness, she drew my attention to M. Sécherin, and said to me with an air of candour most marvellously put on.

"God bless my soul, I want to make a conquest of my husband that's all."

M. Sécherin could not resist this attack, he seized his wife's hand, kissed it tenderly several times over and exclaimed.

"Isn't she a nice natural little woman? eh cousin—isn't she, that's all? But she is right enough, you must be forgetting your own lessons, for you used to say to me. "My dear cousin, it is for her husband more particularly that a woman ought to dress herself, and make herself look nice, and *vice versa*, a husband ought to dress himself, and make *himself* look nice more especially for his wife. Ha, ha, cousin, we don't forget your counsels, no, no, make yourself easy upon that point. So I shall just follow Ursula's example and ask your permission to retire, that I may make myself look as

fine as I can, for her. For, as you said, when a husband begins to neglect his appearance it is a proof that he no longer entertains any passion for his wife, and when he no longer entertains any passion for his wife—”

“Everything may be exaggerated,” I said, interrupting M. Sécherin, for Gontran might return at any minute, and I should have been deeply humiliated at suffering Ursula to guess with what contempt my husband had for some time treated me.

I continued therefore.

“There is a certain freedom which accords to perfection with a retired country life, minute attention to one’s dress is, under such circumstances, almost out of place, almost in bad taste.”

“Ah, Matilda, Matilda,” said Ursula with a smile “look at yourself then, what elegance—I never saw you dressed with more coquettish gracefulness.”

I knew not how to reply. Wishing to neglect nothing which might re-animate Gontran’s love, at Maran as well as formerly at Chantilly, I had but one end in view, that of pleasing him as much as possible, in spite of his disdain.

At this instant, I heard a door open, and I recognised Gontran’s step. I blushed with shame.

He entered the apartment—What was my astonishment, he was dressed with the most perfect elegance and taste. I was so accustomed to see him so slovenly a figure, that I could hardly recognise him. I examined Ursula with the utmost attention when my husband entered—she did not blush.

Gontran received our guests with thorough and graceful cordiality. His features, which during two months had scarcely relaxed in their cold expression towards me, now resumed that enchanting one which, when he chose, lent them an irresistible fascination.

Ursula and her husband left us a few minutes before dinner. I could not help observing to Gontran,

“Of course you knew that Ursula was here?”

“Why? because I have taken off my shooting dress which I never do when we are alone?”

“Certainly, it may be a childish feeling but I think that what you do for a stranger—”

“I might do for you is not that it?” he asked me.

“I believe, my love, that I have as much right as my cousin to be treated with consideration by you.”

“Allow me, dearest, to observe that consideration does not consist in one sort of dress or another. It is only natural that I should dress myself in a suitable manner, in order to receive your cousin. I did not invite her but yourself, I therefore believe that I am doing what is agreeable to you by receiving her as well as I can, and

in paying her those attentions which every man owes to any woman whom he has the honour of receiving as a guest."

"Did you not know that Ursula was coming here this autumn?" I asked my husband, endeavouring to read his countenance as I did so. His features did not change a muscle, and he replied,

"I had not an idea of it, but after all, I am enchanted that it should be as it is. Her presence will be an amusement to you, and her husband is the best fellow in the world. But what is the matter? the arrival of your friend does not cause you so much pleasure as I anticipated."

"I have my reasons for that, my love—And I am afraid that my cousin's stay here, will not be so long as she perhaps hopes."

"Her husband's affairs will shorten it doubtless! Did she tell you so?"

"No—but—"

"But? what *do* you mean?"

"I shall implore Ursula to go away."

"You! and why?"

"Because—because—"

"Well?"

"Because I have reasons to dread her presence, because—I am jealous of her, Gontran!"

"Of your cousin! upon my word, my love, you have lost your senses!"

"I have not lost my senses, Gontran. The instinct of my heart does not deceive me."

"If that is the case you will make her visit to Maran a most agreeable one truly! this fancy of yours is indeed a promising one! It seems to be a settled thing that with you one is never to have a moment's peace. Ah! what an unfortunate disposition is yours—unfortunate both for yourself and for others!"

"But, my God! is it my fault if I have suspicions, if—"

"But, once more I tell you, your suspicions shew a want of common sense, do reflect that you are accusing me without reason, and tormenting yourself without any cause."

"Is that true? is that really true? Gontran, be generous, reassure me—I am so much terrified."

"Poor Matilda," said Gontran to me with an air of touching dignity, "I will talk to you no more of my love, perhaps you would not believe me—but I *will* say to you that M. Sécherin, our relation, has come to live in our house and that I should be a scoundrel if I even thought only of abusing in so cowardly a manner, the hospitality which we offer him."

I pressed Gontran's hand in my own, those simple yet noble words gave me fresh courage.

Ursula and her husband now returned, I thought my cousin look-

ing so pretty, so fresh, and with such a bewitching colour—her eyes were at the same time so soft and yet so brilliant; her smile so penetrating and yet so coquettish, her figure so faultless, that I cast my eyes upon a mirror which was opposite to me that I might compare myself to Ursula.

Alas! I remarked with anguish that I was pale, that my features were altered, faded, and languishing. For I had for some time been far from well, I constantly experienced a vague feeling of being ill at ease, a painful oppression which I attributed to sorrow, and which was incessantly increasing. For the first time I perceived that my face had already lost that first bloom of youth which rendered the features of Ursula so fascinating.

The dinner was a very gay one, thanks to my husband who was in buoyant spirits. Ursula was evidently suffering under some constraint, she feared to appear too gay, and thus to lose her charm of melancholy in my eyes, while on the other hand she regretted not being able to exhibit in more brilliant colours before Gontran. Towards the end of dinner M. Sécherin returned to his unlucky proposal.

"Cousin," he said to M. de Lancry, "I was maintaining just now to Madame de Lancry, that my wife was able to ride any one of your horses, I don't care which."

"What! madame, do you ride?" said Gontran with astonishment. "Why that is indeed a piece of good luck for us; I should be almost bold enough to add, for you, for the country round Maran is delicious, and I am enchanted at being able to offer you this amusement."

"But, love," I observed to my husband. "You have no horse trained to carry a lady—for you know you would never allow me to accompany you out hunting. And it would be an act of great imprudence to expose Ursula to—"

"But I have already told you, cousin, that my wife rides beautifully," exclaimed M. Sécherin interrupting me. "She has done nothing else but ride for the last two months."

"Matilda is right," said Ursula with a look of resignation, "it will be more prudent to refrain from horse exercise."

"You may be sure, madame," said Gontran to her, "that nothing in the world would induce me to expose you to any danger. Madame de Lancry was never on horseback in her life, and therefore I have been obliged, from motives of prudence, to deprive myself of the pleasure of her company—while you, from what my cousin tells me—"

"I'll answer for it that my wife will astonish you!" exclaimed M. Sécherin. "The riding master at Tours could not believe his own eyes."

"I just happen to have an excellent mare as gentle as a lamb,"

said M. de Lancry, "nothing could suit Madame Sécherin better, and if my cousin will put a little confidence in me, she need not fear."

"I have, doubtless, entire confidence in you, cousin," said Ursula, with hesitation.

"How childish you are," said M. Sécherin to his wife. "Madame de Lancry don't want to prevent your riding because she is no horsewoman herself. Do you cousin?"

"Come, my dear Matilda," said Gontran to me, "there shall be no appeal from your decision on this important question, your great wisdom shall be sole judge. Will you allow Madame Secherin to ride, or not? Take care—if you say no. As you would deprive her and myself also of a very great pleasure, we should both of us bear you a mortal grudge in consequence, I give you notice."

"And rightly too, I will join their party," exclaimed M. Sécherin with a loud laugh, "for you will have prevented my wife from appearing in her full beauty—she never looks more pretty than when she is on horseback."

I could not give any serious reason for further objections, and I replied with some trouble in my voice.

"I have no objection—it was only from motives of prudence that I made that observation to Ursula."

"Oh! you may be quite easy, there will be no danger," continued my husband, "I answer for *Stella's* docility, a child might ride her."

"Since you absolutely wish it, Matilda," said my cousin to me. "I will try, but really I am afraid I shall be so awkward."

"Oh! as to that, cousin," replied Gontran with a smile. "I defy you to be so, and this is no flattery, for it is impossible for some people not to do everything with grace and dexterity. And it is not their fault if they are enchanting."

"Well, and when is this fine expedition to take place?" asked M. Sécherin.

"Why to-morrow. It was a magnificent sunset this evening," said Gontran "it will be a beautiful day to-morrow, we will mount our horses at one o'clock, and have a regular lady's hunting party."

"But as for me, cousin, I give you due notice that I am too much of a tailor on horseback to go out hunting."

"You, my dear M. Sécherin shall accompany us, in the carriage with Madame de Lancry, one of my kennel men who knows the forest thoroughly shall go on horseback and conduct you to the cross roads, where you will get an excellent view of the hunt."

"Well and good—it will be quite a royal pleasure," exclaimed M. Sécherin. "I too whose only sporting has been with my game keeper and his two terriers—I only hope it may be fine."

"I can assure you the weather will be superb to-morrow, Madame Secherin desires it too much for that not to be the case. To-morrow





Young and Beauty

then will be an enchanting day, I will answer for that," said Gontran.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE STAG HUNT.

I FOUND it impossible to have any private conversation with my cousin that evening, she had the same room as her husband, and two or three times after dinner, I fancied that she avoided me. I suffered cruelly that night. A profound melancholy was added to that sense of physical uneasiness which had for some time oppressed me.

I experienced all the most poignant, and all the most bitter pangs of jealousy. In vain I tried to convince myself of the injustice, and exaggeration of my suspicions, in vain I told myself that perhaps after all there was but a little innocent coquettishness at the bottom of Ursula's conduct, I could not succeed in re-assuring myself.

I determined to watch my cousin and my husband attentively during that cruel day and to have a serious conversation with her the morning, after. Gontran was not mistaken in his hopes, the day was a glorious one, and a brilliant October sun announced one of those last autumnal days, which are almost as beautiful as those of summer. At twelve o'clock we set off for the hunting *rendez-vous*.

M. de Lancry had made his attendants put on their best liveries, and from the windows of the château we had seen them set off with the hounds, while they blew a merry blast on their horns. A carriage with four horses drove up to the steps and I got in with M. Sécherin.

I only dwell upon these childish particulars of opulent luxury for two reasons, first, because I saw by the expression of Ursula's features that she admired as much as she envied that splendour, and then because all that gala ostentation formed a melancholy contrast to my sorrow.

I waited with impatience for Ursula's appearance, I was curious to see if she really looked so well on horseback as her husband asserted. I hoped that such might not be the case, and I wished that she might meet not with any dangerous accident, but with some little mischance which might make her look ridiculous in Gontran's eyes and punish her for her overweening presumption.

Alas ! I had not even that melancholy satisfaction. When my

cousin joined us, on horseback with my husband, I was forced to own that she looked prettier than I had ever seen her.

And, by the way, I never could understand how jealousy can deny or distort the advantages possessed by a rival, on the contrary I have always been inclined to exaggerate them. But without any exaggeration Ursula looked so thoroughly elegant and graceful on horseback, that I was on the point of crying with annoyance. I can see her now—her riding habit of dark blue cloth so long as almost to touch the ground, fitted tightly to the waist and in the sleeves, and set off her fascinating figure to the utmost advantage, she wore a man's hat, and a shirt collar turned down over a small, cherry coloured satin cravat, her pretty face, always so fresh and rosy, acquired from this dress a kind of rakish and decided look, which became her admirably, while her beautiful dark hair came down on each side of her dimpled cheeks. I had never seen her eyes look so purely blue. You would have said the very sky was reflected in them, as in a mirror.

The mare, on which she sate with an ease and assurance that confounded me, was a yellow-dun, whose coat glittered like gold in the sun-light, and whose long, black mane waved and streamed out in the breeze. The animal seemed pleased at having to carry so light a burden, and walked so springily that her steps scarcely brushed the grass.

Gontran rode a thorough bred horse, as black as ebony; and wore a hunting dress of his own livery, light blue with orange velvet collar, and silver gilt buttons with his arms. His graceful figure was well set off by the belt of his hunting knife which was also half silver and half gold, and his black velvet cap which left his features exposed made their refined and graceful expression still more remarkable. Gontran's extreme attention to his dress upon this occasion struck me so much the more, because on his sporting expeditions, he was generally dressed in a way that was even more than negligent.

My cousin tried to approach the carriage in order to speak to me. The mare, frightened no doubt at the parasol I carried, refused to go on.

I confess it, to my shame, I was delighted at this little untoward event which might be too much for Ursula's dexterity, but, to my great astonishment, (I dare not say to my terror) her pretty eyebrows contracted with a frown, she raised her riding cane, and began to punish the mare as boldly as possible.

"Take care, madame, do not strike *Stella* she is very hot!" exclaimed Gontran terrified at Ursula's audacity.

"Do not put yourself in a passion, my little wife, I implore you" exclaimed my cousin anxiously extending both his clasped hands towards his wife,

Ursula however with crimsoned cheeks, expanded nostrils, eyes sparkling with anger, and a disdainful smile upon her ruby lips, paid no heed to their warnings. She resolutely inflicted a fresh punishment upon *Stella* who reared so violently that I screamed with terror.

Ursula, without appearing in the least intimidated leant forward upon *Stella's* neck, giving the mare her head and all this with a movement so natural that she seemed to run no danger.

"Bravo cousin ! gloriously done !" exclaimed Gontran who could not conceal his admiration "what self-possession ! what courage !"

Still more stimulated by this approval, Ursula became determined to conquer the mare's obstinacy and to force the animal to approach the carriage. A few more blows of the cane, smartly administered, subdued *Stella*, not however till after a fresh struggle of some instants' duration, in which the mare, instead of rearing, plunged most viciously. Ursula, whose rounded and exquisitely moulded figure undulated with all the suppleness of a serpent, followed the impetuous movements of the animal so gracefully, that she did not lose her seat for a moment.

This incident which I had hoped to see turn against my cousin, only served to lend her fresh fascinations, she overcame the rebellious brute and forced it to keep near the carriage. Then bending lightly forward from her saddle, Ursula with a proud smile of triumph, and patting *Stella's* brawny neck with her little white hand which she had coquettishly ungloved, enjoyed her victory with a brilliant glance at Gontran, as if to tell him that it was *his* presence which gave her so much courage.

"Well, cousin," exclaimed M. Sécherin "what did I tell you ? An't she a bold one ? confess she is a regular groom !"

"Really, madame," said Gontran approaching with an air of emotion. "I cannot get over my astonishment at your intrepidity and gracefulness. One forgets the danger you are running, and one only thinks of the admiration which you inspire."

"Oh, it is so amusing to ride !" replied Ursula with simplicity. And she then continued addressing herself to me. "How can you deprive yourself of such an enchanting pleasure ? For us women especially, what a happiness is it to have the power, notwithstanding our weakness, of mastering, subduing, and governing an animal which would kill us a thousand times over did we not oppose dexterity to strength, an intelligent will to a brutal obstinacy."

"This is a little the secret of your dominion in most things" said Gontran with a smile "and you subdue us men pretty much in accordance with the same principles and by the same means—But, good God ! what is the matter with you, my love ?" said M. de Lancry to me, observing the alteration of my features, for Ursula's

triumph and the admiration which Gontran displayed towards her, caused me to suffer intensely.

"There is nothing the matter with me, love, only Ursula's example encourages me. I am absolutely determined to ride, and shall begin to-morrow."

"But you have never tried, dearest, and then I think you are not likely to succeed very well, you are too timid."

"I tell you that I will try even should I be killed on the spot," I exclaimed.

"Well, well, we will talk of that another time," said Gontran to me, "let us set off for the hunting *rendezvous*, for it is already late. Cousin, I am at your orders."

"We shall meet again presently, good bye Matilda," said Ursula, making me a sign with her hand.

"Pray don't be rash, my good little wife—I recommend her to you, M. de Lancry," exclaimed M. Sécherin.

"Make yourself quite easy, my dear cousin," replied my husband, "there is never any danger for one so light, dexterous, and intrepid as she is."

Ursula and Gontran now cantered off side by side, upon a piece of green sward, which was the continuation of the alley through which our carriage was proceeding. We accompanied them for some time, I followed them with my eyes as long as I could, but they soon disappeared in a winding avenue where the carriage could not pass, and I lost sight of them.

All these details will seem childish to those who do not know the innumerable tortures of jealousy, and the irritating wounds of self-love. Nevertheless, this scene, though in appearance so insignificant a one, upset me to such a degree that I was upon the point of committing an act of infamy—of denouncing Ursula's conduct to M. Secherin, and making him share my suspicions against his wife.

Fortunately shame kept this terrible confession from my lips. If my cousin had possessed the least discernment, he would have guessed the cause of my agitation and uneasiness. I answered him in the most absent manner, and sometimes I fell into profound reveries, scarcely interrupted by the noise of the hunt, which now and then traversed those extensive avenues that met at the cross roads, where we placed ourselves to see it pass, conducted to one of the most likely points, by one of M. de Lancry's attendants.

What caused me a profound, a fatal, a strange impression was to see every now and then Gontran and Ursula rapidly appear—and always side by side—at the end of some shady lane. The distant and melancholy sound of the horns, which echoed through the dense and shade-enveloped woods, the deep bay of the hounds, seemed to me sinister and fearful noises. Alas! a melancholy disposition of heart and soul covers, with a veil of mourning, the most cheerful

objects, and seeks for lugubrious omens in that which causes joy and pleasurable excitement to all besides.

M. Sécherin was in such raptures at the exciting sight before him, that he did not remark my languor and melancholy—that uneasy sensation which I had now for some time experienced, increased more and more. I frequently felt a sudden shivering, which I could account for in no other way than by attributing it to a nervous cause. I suffered also from pain in the head, attended with weakness and heat.

We had just arrived and come to a halt in one of the cross-ways, of the forest, Ursula and Gontran were advancing rapidly in a transverse direction. I thought they were about to join us, and I leant out of the carriage.

Effectively they were soon close to us, but they did not stop.

"Matilda" exclaimed Ursula, as she passed swiftly by, and saluting me with her hand, "I am mad with rapture at this glorious hunt," and with a heightened colour on her cheeks and a glance of bold brightness in her eyes, she gave *Stella* a blow with the cane, as a hint to improve her pace.

"The stag cannot hold out above half an hour," cried Gontran to us, "the hounds are working admirably—he will soon break cover," and leaning forward on his horse's neck, he came up with Ursula, who had got a little the start of him, and both once more disappeared. "How she is amusing herself! God bless my soul! how she is amusing herself!"—joyfully exclaimed M. Sécherin. "But, cousin, what does M. Gontran mean by 'breaking cover'?"

I had heard my husband converse upon sporting topics often enough to be able to reply to M. Sécherin's question.

"It means that the wretched animal, hard pressed in the woods, will soon come out into the open country; that is its only chance of safety; after that, it will be slaughtered without mercy."

I was in such a nervous state, I had for so long suppressed my tears, that seizing, as it were, upon the ridiculous opportunity of giving myself up to a fit of sensibility, I burst into tears.

M. Sécherin looked at me with stupefaction, and said with an air of interest:—

"Good God! what does the death of a stag have such a saddening effect upon *your* feelings, who by this time ought to be used to that sort of thing—come, come, cousin, be reasonable, perhaps, after all, the poor victim will escape from the unhappy fate which threatens it!"

Those who have suffered acutely from some familiar sorrow, which they have been necessarily forced to repress and conceal, those I say will not smile with contempt, when I confess that in my reply to M. Sécherin's last words, I made *for myself alone* a kind of allusion to my own lot, so that I might in some slight degree give free utterance to the sorrow which overwhelmed me.

This is ridiculous, cruelly ridiculous, alas! I know it; but happy are those who know not that the most intense anguish is sometimes grotesque in its expression, which is I believe the highest pitch to which moral torture can attain.

I replied, therefore, to M. Sécherin with tears.

"No, no, the victim cannot escape, what can it do? struggle perhaps? but a struggle requires strength which it no longer possesses.

It has lasted too long already—it has but to resign itself—to give its neck to the knife and—die. And yet life had seemed to it full of beauty—and yet who would think of dying on so lovely a day as this, beneath so bright a sun?—to the sound of those horns and the joyful cries of the hunters?—who thinks of dying?—for whom is this day of pleasure one of mourning?—for the victim, and the victim *only*—The victim will weep, and its tears will be mocked, and it will be killed without pity—without pity!"

"The fact is said M. Sécherin almost with emotion, "that poor animals *do* shed tears when they are about to die. But, listen cousin," he continued "they say also that before dying the stag sometimes defends himself vigorously, and that even in the moment of death, the victim has at least the pleasure of revenge."

In the excited state of my feelings, replying to my own thoughts instead of to M. Sécherin, I dried my tears, looked at him fixedly and said to him with a bitter smile.

"Oh! yes, is it not so? revenge—revenge! not to die feeble, despised, mocked, insulted! but to make those shed tears in their turn, who have derided *your* sufferings—oh! is it not so? revenge—revenge! above all to punish insult—cowardly and miserable insult—the insult which one knows is unpunished—that one believes is unpunished, because the honour and pride of a noble heart prevents an ignoble accusation. Oh! but this *must* end at last, must it not? Yes—you are right—revenge!"

"Why cousin," exclaimed M. Sécherin with difficulty restraining his inclination to laugh "how the deuce can a stag be insulted and think of revenge?"

I looked at M. Secherin and was at first unable to understand him.

In a few moments I recovered my self-possession and said to him.

"Forgive me, forgive me, my dear cousin, really I am quite mad, you are quite right, my sensibility led me away."

"That is just what I was saying to myself, my cousin, talks of that poor stag as if it were a human being. But we must be upon the move again. Don't you hear the horn down yonder? how pretty it sounds. Upon my word hunting is quite a royal pleasure."

The carriage moved on.

I took advantage of this movement to deliver myself up unreservedly, to the most bitter reflections. I pictured to myself

Gontran and Ursula riding at a foot's pace, close to one another, and (in order to rest themselves after the fatigues of the chase) allowing their horses to stray at random down those interminable avenues which nature had adorned with a carpet of verdure, and which were sheltered by trees now clothed in all the richest tints of autumn. Happy in their mutual affection, they were ardently enjoying that mild and beautiful day, that luxurious splendour, that existence of delight, thinking of a future still more enchanting, uttering to each other the tenderest words of passion; and exchanging long and burning glances of love. Perhaps too—the forest is so dense in its foliage and so solitary, that Gontran, bending towards Ursula, has amorously clasped her waist, perhaps his lip is touching her rosy cheek, that cheek rendered still more lovely by the excitement of the past chase.

Oh rage! oh misery! oh torture! I thought. And *I—I—I* am here, crushed, faded, forgotten, mocked, for they are deriding, they are ridiculing *me—me* who am quietly driving about with that husband who is deceived and outraged. And it is *I—I* who gave that needy and almost dishonoured man the château where he is making love to my rival, the luxury with which he dazzles and the pleasures with which he intoxicates her.

Oh! this is frightful! too frightful. This cannot go on—I am weary of this stupid endurance of misfortune—I will bear it no longer—not a moment; close to me is that kind and honourable husband whom they are deceiving—whom they are dishonouring—I will enlighten him—It is not to denounce treachery and corruption, but it is to prevent honour and uprightness personified from being any longer the dupes of traitors.

Once more the fatal confession rose to my lips; Once more I recoiled from the accusation.

About half an hour afterwards, Gontran sent one of his servants to us with the information, that the stag had been taken in a pond, but that the road thither was bad and impassable for carriages; he wished me therefore to return to the château, where he would soon join us with Madame Sécherin.

We arrived at Maran only a few minutes before Ursula and Gontran. After dressing for dinner I returned to the dining room where I found my cousin, my husband and M. Sécherin. At table the conversation turned upon the day's sport and Gontran gave the highest praises to the courage and dexterity of Ursula who declared that she had never enjoyed herself more thoroughly.

My cousin was much more gay than the evening before and seemed to care little about keeping up her melancholy demeanour before me. She drank wine several times with Gontran, to my health, and made little difficulty in taking several glasses of cham-

pagne, to M. Sécherin's great admiration who was constantly exclaiming

"What a little devil my wife is!"

For the first time observing the animation, the gaiety, and the impetuous spirits of my cousin, I foresaw all that was bold and unconquerable in her disposition. Till then she had always seemed to me, an adept in dissimulation. Her audacious falsehoods had always been enveloped in a garb of hypocrisy, and it was with a melancholy look towards heaven, and with her large eyes bathed in tears, that she was accustomed to deny the most self-evident truths, but on seeing her at table so joyous, so resolute, on hearing her lively, unexpected, and often brilliant sallies, I thought her still more dangerous.

My husband did not conceal the kind of admiration with which she inspired him. A sort of contest in wit had been taking place between himself and her, and one in which Gontran sometimes came off second best. He seemed almost fascinated, and enslaved by the ascendancy of that woman, who more than once silenced him by some observation full of cutting irony.

It will seem perhaps strange, almost impossible—but at such times I was pained at the mocking superiority with which Ursula replied to my husband.

I was confounded with astonishment at this metamorphosis of my cousin.

M. Sécherin himself whispered to me that he had never believed his wife to possess so much wit.

I can now account for that transformation. There are certain natures which, so to express myself, never completely reveal themselves till they find themselves in their own *sphere*. Thus Ursula was essentially made for an existence of luxury, splendour, festivities, and inordinate pleasures. A century sooner she would have been one of those witty and shameless women who were queens of the orgies during the Regency.

For the first time, perhaps, since her marriage, she found herself in a position in accordance with her tastes, and doubtless her real disposition was now developing itself almost without her own knowledge.

After dinner the *curée* of the stag was to take place in the court-yard of the château, by torch light, Gontran having chosen to reserve that bloody sight for the gratification of Madame Sécherin.

Towards nine o'clock the huntsmen played a flourish on their horns, which was to be the signal. We proceeded to a terrace which looked upon the great court-yard and extended itself before the windows of the drawing room which we had just left.

The torches which were held by footmen in their full dress

liveries, cast a reddish light upon the buildings, of which a part was in complete obscurity.

It had a sinister effect upon me—The greedy and impatient pack scarcely restrained by the whips of the huntsmen, gave vent to ferocious growlings, and the savage eyes of the hounds glared in the surrounding darkness.

In the middle of the yard M. de Lancry's first huntsman having covered the bones and other remains of the stag with the animal's skin, took the head by the horns and shook it violently before the hounds.

The pack, still kept back, uttered the most furious howlings, till the instant when they were suffered to throw themselves upon those gory remains, during which the horns were loudly sounded. Then commenced a desperate struggle among those eighty hounds, rushing one upon another, howling, snarling, fighting and tearing from each other the bloody remnants of the animal.

This sight, and those yells disgusted me, and I returned into the drawing room, whose windows looked upon the terrace. M. Sécherin had gone down in order to have a nearer view of the *curée*. I felt overcome, more overcome than ever by some uneasy feeling which was entirely physical in its nature, and for the first time, I asked myself what could be the cause.

I let myself fall in a sitting posture upon a chair placed near a window that was half concealed by the curtains, I was mechanically watching the reflection of the expiring torches, as they flashed for an instant and then became extinguished, for the *curée* was now at an end—when I beheld Ursula and Gontran stop for a moment before that window—Gontran threw one of his arms round Ursula's waist, and put his lips to my cousin's cheek, in spite of a slight resistance on her part.

Never shall I forget my sensations at that instant ; by a strange fatality, the most cruel pain which I had ever felt, revealed to me, so to speak, the most immense delight which I ever experienced.

I know not by what phenomenon the blow which I felt was so violent a one, that at the same instant it was answered by a shiver from the very bottom of my heart, which suddenly enlightened me as to the cause of that uneasiness which I had for some time experienced. *I felt that I was a mother.*

Such was the impression caused upon me by such intoxicating delight, and such overwhelming misery, that for a moment, I thought I should lose my senses.

In my bewilderment, I mechanically rose from my seat. ; I ran across the drawing room, I shut myself up in my own room, and throwing myself on my knees, I could only utter these words :—

“My God ! thou hast heard me ; I can be miserable now no

longer ! at the very instant when I was about to die of grief, thou hast sent me, oh ! how ineffable a hope !”

I had not perceived Blondeau, who was in the alcove.

“ Good God ! madame, what is the matter ?

Without replying to her, I pointed to the door of my apartment, saying—“ I wish to be alone, shut that door, leave me, and go and say that I wish to be alone.”

Blondeau went out and informed M. de Lancry that I was unwell and wished to see no one.

Effectively I was left to my solitary meditations.

I could no longer entertain a doubt that my husband was faithless—and I was a mother.



## CHAPTER XLVIII

### A MOTHER.

NEVER shall I forget the engrossing emotions of that night which I passed in a kind of *reasonable delirium*, if I can use such an expression.

At one minute I walked, with hasty steps up and down my room, at the next I suddenly stopped, threw myself upon my knees, and prayed most fervently ; and then what bursts of delight, what sensations of unbounded happiness, what thrills of dignified yet calm pride did I experience !

I was a mother ! I was a mother ! At that intoxicating thought, I was seized with fits of idolizing tenderness for the being that I bore within me. I could not believe in so much felicity. I pressed my two hands to my face, as if to satisfy myself that I was alive. I fancied that to each pulsation of my heart another gentle and slight pulsation answered—it was that of my child's heart.

My child, my child ? I was never weary of repeating those blessed, those enchanting words.

In my intoxication, I called it, I devoured it with caresses, I was like a mad woman, I kissed my own hands, and then I burst into laughter at my own childishness—an instant afterward, I burst into tears, but tears that were salutary and good to weep.

It was, I believe, three or four o'clock in the morning.

I fancied that my happiness required air and space, and that I had the need of finding myself face to face with heaven, that I might express to God my religious gratitude.

I opened my window ; it was now the end of autumn ; the night was as beautiful and pure, as the day had been superb ; not the least noise was to be heard. All was shade and mystery ; and the

vaults of heaven were studded with millions of sparkling stars. The moon rose from behind a hill that was covered with great woods, and every object was suddenly flooded with its pale light; the park, the forest, the meadows, the castle.

Then a feeble breeze suddenly sprang up, increased, passed rapidly through the air, like an immense sigh, and all returned to silence.

I saw an omen in that imposing murmur which had disturbed the solitude of nature for a moment, and which made the calm that succeeded appear still more profound.

I fancied that my heart had uttered its last sigh, and that henceforth my life would glide on in happiness and tranquillity.

For the first time since I had possessed the proud consciousness of maternity—since my existence had become a *double* one, I reflected on my past sufferings. It was to blush for having been afflicted at sorrows that reached only myself.

When I remembered that so fatal and so enchanting an evening on which I had acquired both the certainty of Gontran's unfaithfulness, and the certainty also that I was a mother, I was astonished at the profound and ineffable serenity which came to replace those poignant emotions which even recently—had agitated me so cruelly.

I could not doubt that Gontran had deceived me—and yet I felt an infinite kindness, an unlimited indulgence towards him.

My husband had yielded to a transitory fancy, it was a weakness—a fault—but he was the father of my child and it was to him that I was indebted for the new and heavenly sensation which I experienced.

These reflections awakened in me an inexpressible mixture of tenderness, devotion, respect, and gratitude, which left me neither the wish nor the courage to accuse Gontran for his past errors.

As for the future—oh! as for the future, this time at least, I had no longer any doubts or anxieties on that score.

The revelation which I was about to make to my husband would ensure me, I do not say his love, his warm attentions, his exquisitely watchful tenderness, but still more, a kind of affectionate and religious veneration which would be uninterrupted for an instant.

Yes, it was more than a mere hope, more than a mere presentiment which now guaranteed me the delight of a future compared to which, those few fleeting days of happiness which had been spent at Chantilly and which I had always hitherto so much regretted, would themselves, even, appear pale and cold.

Yes, I had a profound, absolute, enlightened faith in my happiness to come, a faith whose source was derived from what is most sacred amongst all divine and natural sentiments.

At that moment when God was blessing and consecrating my love,

to feel any doubts for the future would have been blasphemy. From that time I felt a kind of compassionate contempt, of patronizing pity for Ursula.

I could no longer honour her so far as to be jealous of her ; towards her I could no longer condescend to hatred,

I was now soaring in a sphere so exalted ; I had now such a conviction of my immense superiority over Ursula, that it was even impossible for me to establish the slightest comparison between her and myself.

For the first time, for many days a *real* smile lighted up my lips, when I remembered, that, the evening before, I had envied her the gracefulness with which she sat on horseback ; that the evening before, I had envied her the brilliant sallies of her wit.

In spite of myself, I shrugged my shoulders with contempt at that remembrance. In my imperious and generous pride, I felt pity for that poor woman ; who, after all, perhaps, had been unable to resist the inclination, which attracted her towards Gontran—an inclination, of which I knew the irresistible power.

"My God," I said to myself, "what an awakening will Ursula's be after the dream of a few days !" Then I called to mind our childhood—our former friendship. Happiness renders us so compassionate, that I was moved with tender emotion, when I thought of my cousin.

I promised myself, to entreat my husband to tell her as discreetly as possible, that she could no longer stay with us. I did not wish to make a cruel abuse of my triumph.

It would be impossible for me to explain the complete revolution which maternity had just operated in even my slightest thoughts ; ideas grave, solemn, almost austere, had been aroused in me, in the space of a night ; as if God wished to prepare a mother's heart and soul for the celestial duties which she has to fulfil toward her child.

I, hitherto so feeble, so timid, so resigned, now felt myself suddenly strong, resolute and courageous—it was the hand of God sustaining me.

An entirely new horizon was opened to my view ; and the limits of my existence seemed to me to be put back by the infinite hopes of maternity. Merely in those simple words,—"*to bring up my child*," there was a universe of fresh sensations. \* \* \* \*

By degrees morning dawned.

My first impulse was to tell everything to my husband, and to change, by that sudden avowal, his coldness into adoration : then I thought I would temporize for a little while, and delay the moment of my triumph, in order to enjoy it with greater relish.

I experienced a kind of delight in saying to myself—"with one word I can make Gontran more passionately attached to me than he

ever has been—Gontran who, only yesterday, was forgetting me for another woman."

Quite re-assured as to the future, I delighted in calling up the memories of my most unhappy days. I acted like these people, who miraculously delivered from some great peril, contemplate for the last time, with rapture not unmingled with terror—the abyss which so nearly swallowed them up—the rock which so nearly crushed them.

A profound and refreshing sleep surprised me in the midst of these reflections.

I awoke late, and found my poor Blondeau at my bed side, in a state of much uneasiness and melancholy; my sorrows had not escaped her notice: but, great as was my confidence in her, I had never said a word to her of accusation against Gontran.

My countenance wore so radiant an expression of joy that Blondeau exclaimed, looking at me with surprise,

"Blessed Saviour! madame, what happy event can have taken place? Yesterday I left you in such a state of depression that I spent the whole night in tears and prayers."

"My good Blondeau, you yourself will go mad with joy when you hear... But go quick and fetch M. de Lancry...go."

M. le Vicomte has already sent to enquire after madame...as well as Monsieur and Madame Sècherin. I said that you had not had a good night, and Monsieur seemed uneasy."

"Well then! go. go quick and fetch him. I will reassure him."

Blondeau left the room.

As the moment approached when I was about to see Gontran again, my heart beat with more and more violence.

My husband appeared.

I threw myself into his arms, burst into tears, and was unable to utter a word.

Gontran was deceived, he took my tears for tears of grief. Thinking doubtless that I had seen him kiss Ursula the night before and that I was in despair, he said to me with embarrassment

"I entreat you do not believe appearances, do not cry...do not.—"

"But I am crying with joy...Gontran...with joy...look at me, look at me!" I exclaimed.

"Effectively," replied my husband, "that smile, that expression of happiness diffused over your features, Matilda...Matilda, what is the meaning..."

"It means that I know everything, and that I forgive you every thing. Yes, my beloved Gontran...yes...last night upon that balcony I saw your arm round Ursula's waist...last night I saw your lips touch her cheek. Well! I forgive you, do you hear?...I forgive you, because presently you will accuse yourself more bitterly

than I ever could have accused you. .because presently on your bended knees you will say to me..." Pardon ! pardon !"

" But once more...Matilda."

" You do not understand ? Gontran, you do not guess ? No, you look at me with terror, you think that I am jeering...perhaps that I am mad ? But it is my turn now to ask forgiveness from you...and from God, for it is wrong not to talk of so holy a happiness with the solemn austerity which it deserves, Gontran !" I then exclaimed, taking my husband by the hand " kneel down with me ...God has blessed our union. I am a mother !"

Oh ! I was not mistaken in my hope ! Gontran's features expressed the most delightful surprise ; the most profound joy. Overwhelmed with contending emotions, for an instant he pressed me in his arms with the warmest tenderness...tears...the only ones I had ever seen him shed, dropped from his brimming eyes. He gazed at me with love, with adoration, almost with respect.

" Oh !" he exclaimed taking my two hands into his own, " You are right, Matilda, on my bended knees I will pray for your forgiveness, noble, generous-hearted, heavenly-minded woman ! And I could injure you ! you—you always so resigned, so gentle. Oh ! once more, pardon !"

" Did I not tell you, my Gontran, my beloved, that it would be so, that you would ask me to forgive you ? But alas ! I feel I cannot grant you that pardon now, for I have forgotten the injury."

" Ah ! Matilda ! Matilda ! I have erred deeply" exclaimed Gontran with a melancholy shake of his head. " But, believe me, it was unsteadiness—frivolity—but my heart, my love, my veneration, were yours—always yours—*Now* the new duties which devolve upon me render a new conduct imperative, and you will see—oh you will see my love ! how worthy I shall be of the happiness which is coming to us. How sacred you will be to me—Matilda ! Matilda !" he added kissing my hands with transport—" Oh ! believe me, this moment enlightens me, never have I better felt all your worth, and, how unworthy I have hitherto been of your excellencies. I swear to you, Matilda, I love you now more passionately perhaps than even during those happy days at Chantilly...those days, my poor girl, which you are always so much regretting—Now I say as you do—if you can no longer forgive me the injury because you have forgotten it, I cannot ask for that forgiveness because I can no longer believe that I ever can have injured you."

" Oh ! Gontran...Gontran...that is your own heart, your own language...it is you indeed, I recognise you again Oh ! my God ! my God ! give me force to support so much happiness !"

" Yes, yes, it is I, your friend, your lover, Matilda...your lover, who was not changed...no, no, I swear it to you...but thanks to you, I

was so happy, so happy, that I thought no more of that happiness which I owed to you, than one thinks of thanking God for a life which flows on happy and without care...and then if I was sometimes negligent, capricious, and fanciful, I must reproach you for it, my guardian angel, my beloved...yes, I was like those spoiled children whom their mother in her idolizing tenderness never scolds! for their greatest faults she has only a smile, or a gentle remonstrance—and yet...no,” he went on with a touching gracefulness, “no, I am trying to excuse myself, to make less of my faults and that is wrong...I have been selfish, harsh, indifferent, unfaithful, for some time I never appreciated the most adorable disposition which exists in the world...Oh! Matilda, I do not dread to paint the past in the blackest colours, the future will absolve me.”

“Do not let us talk of that, Gontran, let us talk of it...of our child—what will be your projects? What joy! what felicity! If it is a boy how beautiful he will be! if it is a girl how lovely *she* will be! *He* will have your eyes, *she* will have your smile, and such beautiful dark hair, such rosy cheeks, such a dear little white neck, and such sweet little dimpled shoulders! Ah! Gontran, I am raving, upon my word, I am mad. I shall never be able to wait till then!” I exclaimed with such simplicity, that Gontran could not help smiling.

“Tell me,” he replied, “what do you prefer? Would you like to remain here some time longer, or go at once and settle at Paris? Tell me, Matilda—give your orders—*now* I have no will of my own.”

“Now, on the contrary, my love, you must exercise a will both for yourself and for me; for I shall be completely absorbed by one sole thought—my child. Beyond that one fixed idea I shall be good for nothing.”

“Since you leave me free to choose, I will reflect upon the proper course to pursue—I will consider the matter over.”

“Whatever you do, dearest, will be well done; and among other considerations you will consult economy, will you not? for *now* we must be prudent; we have not ourselves only to think of, we must begin from the present moment to think of our dear child's dowry; and now-a-days, money is so paramount, that riches afford an additional chance of happiness. Let us think, dearest, what reductions shall we make in our establishment!”

“We will think about it, Matilda, you are quite right. What a happiness it will be to replace a frivolous and useless luxury by a touching care for the future lot of that being, who will be dearer to us than anything in the world! Ah! we shall never have experienced so much felicity from the possession of wealth!”

“Upon my word, dearest, when I think that each privation of mine might increase the future prosperity of my child, I am really afraid of becoming a miser.”

“Dearest and best beloved make yourself easy on that score.

Like you I feel all the new duties which now devolve upon us, and I will be wanting in none of them. Like you, Matilda, last night has operated a change in me," added Gontran, with an inimitable accent of graceful tenderness.

My husband was then speaking with sincerity ; I was sufficiently versed in the expression of his countenance to read in it a touching truthfulness.

When he was expressing his regrets for having tormented me, he was speaking truly ; the hardest hearts, the most unpitiful dispositions often have a meritorious reaction ; much more than was Gontran capable of a generous emotion : he was not naturally depraved, but had been spoiled by too much adoration.

I repeat it ; I am certain that my husband, at that instant, had become once more to me, what he was when we married.

I was so impressed with this conviction ; it seemed to me so natural, that the transitory fancy which my husband had entertained for Ursula, should be at once extinguished by the revelation which I had just made to him, that without the slightest hesitation, or the slightest embarrassment, I said to Gontran ;—

"Now, dearest, how shall we get rid of Ursula?"

At this question, full of simplicity, Gontran looked at me, and reddened with surprise.

"It astonishes you to hear me talk in this way of my cousin ;" I said to him with a smile, "and yet nothing can be more simple ; at this moment I feel no animosity against, no jealousy of her ; I havenot time to do so, I am too happy ! She has played the coquette with you, you have paid attention to her ; I forgive all that : this was all merely the flightiness of *youth*, which now, dearest, you will not remember any longer. I only wish that you who have so much tact, and are so clever, would hit upon some plan to get Ursula out of the way, without harshness or too great pain to her feelings ; for in spite of myself I cannot help pitying her ; perhaps for a moment, she may have believed that you really loved her."

Gontran looked at me in great confusion, and scarcely seemed to believe what he heard. After a minute's silence, he exclaimed ;—

"Always noble ! always generous ! Ah ! I should be the most guilty of men were I ever to forget your conduct on the present occasion. Yes, you are right, Matilda, I will expiate as I ought these giddy errors of my youth. Your cousin must go away, and must go away as soon as possible ; not that I doubt my own resolution, but because it would be painful for you to see her, when the transport you now feel shall have passed off."

"You say rightly, dearest—you know me better than I know myself. If you knew—I have suffered so much on her account. But, come—Gontran—we will not talk any more on that point—

all is forgotten. It will be easy for Ursula to persuade her husband to leave Maran, for her will is his. But," I added with some hesitation. "How will you manage to bring Ursula to that determination?"

"Nothing can be simpler. I shall tell her everything frankly and openly."

"You will tell her."

"I shall tell her that she and I have been mad, that we have run the risk of seriously compromising, she,—the tranquillity of the best man in the world, I,—the peace of the tenderest and most adorable of women. I shall tell her that our imprudence has alarmed your suspicions, and that for no consideration in the world would I cause you the least sorrow; in a word, I shall tell her so, that I implore her to persuade her husband to leave Maran."

I was silent for a moment; notwithstanding my faith in Gontran's love, and in my own superiority over Ursula, it pained me to think that my husband was again about to have a secret interview with my cousin. Alas! at that thought all my sensations of jealousy awoke in spite of myself.

I said to Gontran with emotion,

"Then to persuade Ursula to go away, it will be necessary for you to request an interview with her."

"Certainly."

"Well then! I confess it to you, Gontran, that idea is a most painful one to me."

"Come, come," he replied with a smile, "I must have more courage than you. What can we do, however, my poor Matilda?"

"I know not."

"I dare not propose to you to speak yourself to your cousin."

"No, it would hurt me to do so, I feel it would. Such a communication from me would humiliate her bitterly. I cannot forget that she was once my friend—my sister."

"What is to be done then? I might write to her—but that is a dangerous expedient, and besides there are a thousand things which one can say, but which one cannot write—objections which one can reply to *vis à voce*, but which it would take a protracted correspondence to do away with."

After having reflected for some time, Gontran exclaimed delightedly.

"Oh! Matilda—Matilda! what an excellent idea! would you like to have a double proof of my sincerity, and of my desire to make you forget the sorrows which I have caused you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Conceal yourself somewhere, whence you may see and hear everything; and so be secretly present at this interview, which alarms your jealousy so much."

"Gontran, what do you say?—Ah such a trial!"—

"Has nothing to frighten you.—Believe me once more, Matilda, my angel—my well beloved, I will tell you everything, confide everything to you; be, in short, as frank, as *you* are generous. Forgive me if I hurt your feelings, I will have the courage to do it; for at least this candid avowal will destroy, I am certain, your exaggerated terrors. You will see that I have been more imprudent, more frivolous than culpable. You will see that Ursula has acted most coquettishly towards me; that if on my side I have exceeded the bounds of simple gallantry, still she has not to blush for a grave, an irreparable fault. Well then—yes, last night, after the *curée* had taken place by torch light, I put my arm round her waist, and tried to kiss her in sport; it was a most blameable piece of trifling, I know, although it might be excused by the familiarity which is authorised by relationship."

"And at Rouvray, Gontran?"

"Rouvray, as here I paid Ursula some of those compliments which one pays all women. I told her she was a delightful person, and that I should be in raptures if she would make a long stay with us: she received my compliments coquettishly, certainly, but still laughing all the time, and without seeing in them, I swear to you, anything more serious than there really was. There is my whole confession, Matilda—forgive me, once more, forgive me."

"On the contrary, I thank you for those avowals, dearest, they re-assure me; and then it is always better to know the truth, how painful a truth soever it may be, than to frighten oneself with phantoms which are often more terrifying than the reality."

"And now, Matilda, I swear to you upon my honour, by all that is dearest to me in the world, in a word, by *yourself*, that in this interview, I shall address your cousin with a heart filled to overflowing with *you*, with your goodness, and your generosity; and that I will not utter one word without thinking of the tears which I have caused you, noble and heavenly-minded woman, to shed! I swear to you, in short, that the transitory fancy which I have owned to you, has completely vanished before that new tie, so sacred and powerful a one, which renders the other ties that unite us still more binding. Matilda, Matilda, I should be the most despicable of men, if your present condition were not in itself sufficient to command the tenderest attentions the most affectionate respect from me; believe me then, Matilda, and assist, without fear, at this interview. I am proud to have this opportunity of proving to you, that I know, at least, how to expiate the faults which I have committed."

"Oh! I believe you, my beloved Gontran, I resign myself to your advice. Yes; I will have the courage to undergo this trial."

"Thanks, oh! thanks, Matilda, for permitting me thus to justify myself; but I will not have you retain the least doubt, love is suspicious, I know, and perhaps, in spite of yourself, there will still remain in your mind the thought, that I had arranged with Ursula beforehand, that—"

"Ah; Gontran, how wrongfully you judge me!"

"No, no, my poor Matilda, let me do what I wish; the more free, frank, and unforeseen the explanation, the more satisfied will you be. Listen to me then;—you shall go and tell Blondeau to ask your cousin to come and see you here. You shall place yourself there, in the closet of your alcove, and, by leaving that glass door ajar, and lifting up a corner of that curtain, you will be able to see and hear everything that passes. Your cousin will come, I will tell her you are just gone out, that you request her to excuse you, and to rejoin you in the pavilion, in the park. I will keep her here, for a few moments; she will then go out to look for you. Then, emerging from your hiding place—"

"Then, Gontran, I will fall at your knees to thank you a thousand times for having restored to me, in one day, all the happiness which I thought was lost."

As my husband desired, Blondeau went to find Ursula.

It was with a violent beating of the heart, that I entered one of the closets of the alcove. Gontran's tender assurances, and honourable promises, everything, in short, ought to have prevented my feeling the slightest fear; and yet, for another moment, I hesitated. I fancied that I was playing a part unworthy of myself, in thus assisting as an unseen witness of the interview.

And yet, I confess it, my irresolution ceased less from the hope of seeing my rival humiliated, than from the ardent and uneasy expectation of assisting at a scene so new and strange for any woman to witness.

I well knew the plaintive and melancholy accents of Ursula; and I expected to see her burst into tears, when my husband signified his determination to her.

Judging of the love she must feel for Gontran, by the love which I experienced for him myself, I foresaw that the scene would be a cruel one for my cousin; and, whether from weakness or generosity, I could not help pitying her.

I went so far even, as to fear, that Gontran, impelled by his knowledge of my being secretly present, would behave with too much harshness towards her. What an awakening for that unhappy woman, who, doubtless, loved him so tenderly, and believed herself to be so tenderly beloved by him!

Even now I am convinced that my husband was then sincere in his determination of sacrificing a transitory caprice, to the holy and solemn affection which I deserved. I had but one fear, Ursula was so artful, so adroit, she knew how to lend such powerful fascination

to her voice, and to her tears, that, perhaps, my husband's resolution would not be proof against the touching expression of her sorrow.

These reflections had occurred to me more rapidly than thought.

I heard Ursula's light step—I withdrew into my hiding place.

END OF VOL. I.

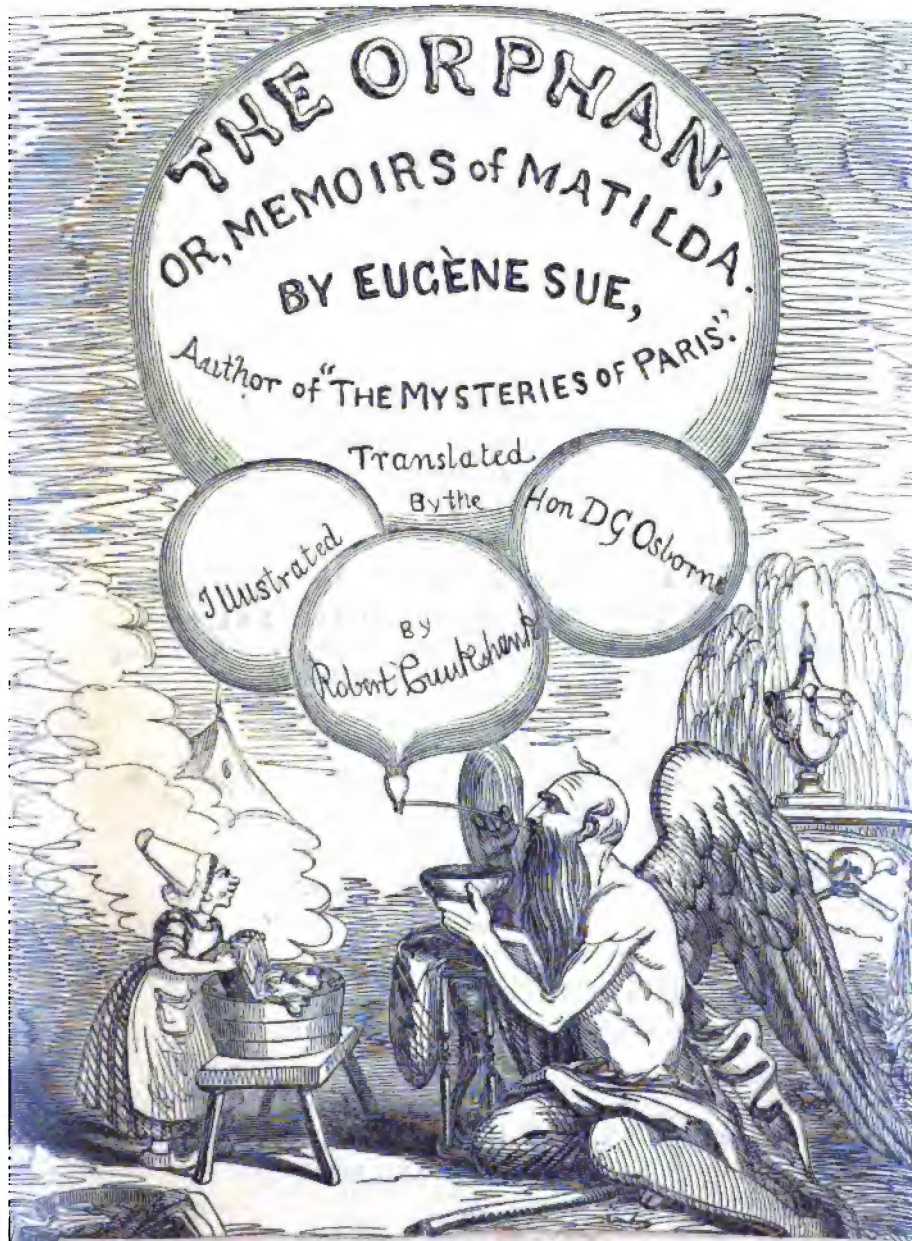
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BY EUGÈNE SUE,  
Author of "THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS".

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EUGENE  
SUE.



MATILDA

Translated by the Hon. J. C. O'Sullivan, and

Robert C. O'Sullivan

Illustrated by

# THE ORPHAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE INTERVIEW.

URSULA, on entering my room, seemed surprised at not finding me there.

Her countenance was gay and cheerful, Gontran's on the contrary, wore an expression of reserve and coldness.

He stood near the chimney-piece against which he was leaning.

Ursula, when she had shut the door, said to him,

"What! are you here? where is Matilda then?"

"She has just been obliged to go down stairs to hear the story of some poor person; she begs you will excuse her, and join her presently in the pavilion in the park."

Ursula appeared to me surprised at my husband's freezing manner, then she smiled, made him a low curtsy, and said to him with a mocking expression of countenance,

"I am much obliged to you, sir, for having condescended to inform me where I shall find the Viscountess de Lancry, and I deeply regret having disturbed your grave meditations."

Ursula took a step towards the door.

"A word with you, I beg," said Gontran.

Ursula, who was about to leave the room, stopped short, slowly turned her head round, threw a long glance of mingled mockery and coquettishness at Gontran, and lifting up one of her taper fingers with an air of menace, said to him,

"A word? well and good—but nothing more—I know it is very dangerous to listen to you—even more so perhaps than to look at you. Come, quick, let's have this word, my handsome but lugubrious cousin."

"What I have to say, madame, is of grave importance."

"Really, sir! of grave importance is it? Well! I am delighted to hear it, it will form an edifying contrast to your habitual wildness and flightiness. Come, 'out with it, I am all ears."

"When I saw you at Rouvray," said Gontran, "two months ago I could not hide from you my admiration of your charms."

"True enough, most worthy cousin, and I remember that in a certain alley of elms you made a declaration to me in due form—impertinently enough, and to which I replied, as I ought, by laughing at you. Come, go on, your sententious and ceremonious gravity amuses and puzzles me infinitely. What are you driving at?"

Gontran cast a look of satisfaction at the door of the closet where I was concealed, and continued,

"On your arrival here I told you all the pleasure I felt at seeing you once more."

"All the *happiness*, my dear and handsome cousin, all the *happiness*, if you please, your least word, alas! is engraved here in indelible characters," said Ursula, putting her hand to her heart, and giving an ironical look at Gontran.

Gontran seemed almost annoyed at this sarcasm, gave a slight frown and replied with firmness,

"I am delighted, madame, that you are in a jesting humour, my task will be the less difficult to fulfil."

"Come, quick, quick, I am upon red-hot coals all this time, my dear cousin—I am burning to know the conclusion of all this, and what will be the advantage of this solemn recapitulation of our—what shall I call it—of our love? no, certainly, you have too much, or too little, to inspire me with *that* sentiment—let us call it our flirtation then, that I believe is the proper word. Do you not think so?"

"Let it be so, madame," replied Gontran, "I will continue then this recapitulation of our—of our flirtation. On your arrival at Maran, I told you all the happiness I felt at seeing you again, all the hope I entertained that you would prolong your visit."

"True again, my handsome cousin; the next day we had a delightful hunting expedition—and you even scolded me a little—though with great tenderness, I must confess—because I seemed to prefer the sonorous echoes of the horns to your amorous declarations—and, to my shame I own it, I did in a great measure deserve your reproaches, for nothing was more enchanting to me, and nothing especially more new than those thrilling flourishes which sounded so bravely through the woods."

"And doubtless a declaration had not the same merit of novelty for you. The confession is one of pleasing simplicity," said Gontran with a smile.

Ursula looked fixedly at my husband, gently bent and then raised her pretty figure to its full height as if she had obeyed a secret movement of admiration for herself, with a gentle movement of her head made the long curls of her dark hair undulate slightly upon her unblushing brow, and replied with a mocking, almost a contemptuous, smile.

"My dear cousin, I am hardly eighteen and I have already been told very often that I am an enchanting person, you will forgive me therefore for being a little *blasee'd* on the score of declarations. My ear has been long accustomed to that flattering and trivial buzzing, and unfortunately you have not awakened in my soul "sensations as strange as they are delicious" I do not doubt that you are an admirable Pygmalion but the marble statue had already become softened and animated before your high and mighty glance condescended to fall upon a poor provincial creature like myself."

I was completely astonished.

It was Ursula who expressed herself thus—she who was formerly so fearfully romantic, so *mis-understood*, so fond of talking of her early grave.

It was Ursula who talked to Gontran in that strain of contemptuous mockery, to him whose successes had been so numerous, to him who was so sought after, so idolised by the most fashionable women.

Gontran appeared no less surprised than myself at this sarcastic language.

Nevertheless I perceived with delight that he had not deceived me."

He might have been rash and inconsiderate in his attentions to Ursula, but he had been preserved from any warmer sentiment by the cold coquetry of my cousin.

Ursula continued with the same irony.

"What is the matter, my dear cousin? you seem annoyed."

"Madame, I never before saw you so satirical."

"Monsieur, I never before saw you so solemn."

"You are right," said Gontran with a smile "we are talking of some foolish and unimportant flirtation between a man and woman of the world, and I am really putting on a doctoral kind of air which is too ridiculous. Well! then my pretty cousin, do you recollect that last night, after the *curée* by torchlight, I forgot myself so far that I attempted to clasp that charming waist, and to touch that fresh and blooming cheek?—well then! I wish to ask your forgiveness for that audacity, and to implore you to forget my folly—I was carried away by a transitory impulse—I had for a moment confused the familiarity of relationship with a more tender sentiment, and I—"

Ursula interrupted my husband with a burst of laughter, and exclaimed.

"Ask my forgiveness! why really there is nothing to forgive, my dear cousin—your virtuous candour has taken alarm without reason, I can assure you—your audacity was very innocent—for your lips touched not that *fresh and blooming cheek* but—the border of my cap. As for that *charming waist* which you *clasped*, somewhat against my will, it is a favour permitted to every man that waltzes with one at a ball, and I cannot see that it is so flattering a one as to occasion you any remorse. I did not act the offended prude last night, because I should have had to complain of or be angry at your bad taste, and under such circumstances a virtuous woman resigns herself, and holds her tongue."

Doubtless Gontran's self-love was wounded by this raillery, for forgetting my presence, he exclaimed almost with arrogance.

"What! madame, was your silence then attributable to resignation and indifference?"

"So much so, my dear cousin, that alas! I can remember the melancholy consequences of your audacity in even their slightest details."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my right hand was on the railing of the balcony, and in withdrawing it, I tore the *Valenciennes* lace on my handkerchief."

"That proves," said Gontran impatiently "that you have an excellent memory, madame."

"It is no proof of the excellence of my memory, cousin, but it is a proof of the angelic purity of my sentiments towards you—"

"Madame!—"

"Why certainly! come, seriously speaking if my silence had been one of emotion—if I had been in love with you—should I have remarked all that? should I have waited till your lips touched my cheek, till your arm clasped my waist to be seized with one of those sudden, mute, and profound emotions, which intoxicate us and make you forget everything else? Why, good God! your hand would scarcely have touched mine, before an electric sensation; rapid as the thunder bolt would have thrown my reason, my senses, into confusion! Almost without knowing it, almost without thinking of it, in short despite myself—I should have fallen into your arms, and in them, should have awakened, remembering nothing, but trembling still all over, with a maddening and unknown emotion such as no human expression can do justice to!"

Misery—misery—never shall I forget the troubled, the passionate accent with which Ursula pronounced these last words, never shall I forget the bright colour which for an instant lighted up her countenance with its crimson reflection, never shall I forget the glance, that dreamy, ardent glance swimming in its voluptuousness, which she cast towards the sky, as though she really felt all that she had just described.

Misery—misery—never, above all, shall I forget with what passionate admiration Gontran contemplated her for several minutes, for she was beautiful—Oh, very beautiful at that instant, not doubtless with a chaste and pure beauty, but with that sensual loveliness which, they say, has so much power over men.

Misery—misery—I saw upon Gontran's features a mixture of grief, rage, and involuntary subjugation which told me, but too plainly, that he was in despair at not having inspired in Ursula those emotions which she had just painted with all the eloquence of passion.

My terror of that woman increased, I was on the point of leaving my hiding-place and interrupting the scene, but swayed by keen curiosity, and uneasily anxious to hear Gontran's reply I remained fixed to my place.

My husband seemed fascinated by Ursula's glance, and he continued with bitterness in his manner.

"Really, madame, your theory is perfection itself, happy the man who will make you put it in practice. With you I am delighted to see that I have been less unfaithful towards my wife than I had believed. I congratulate myself sincerely upon such being the case, and I thank you for displaying, at least with so much frankness, your coquetry towards me."

Ursula laughed heartily once more and continued.

"God bless my soul, with what a look of discouragement your solemnity talks of your conjugal fidelity. One would think you feel remorse for having acted virtuously, and that you are in despair at finding your guilt is so trifling."

"It is true, my dear cousin, I *did* believe myself to be a little less innocent—and I *did* believe you to be a little more ingenuous."

"Upon my word you are getting quite into a rage."

"I? you are mistaken, I assure you."

"You are in a rage, I tell you. Ah! you fancied, my dear cousin, that you had only to appear in order to please and make a conquest of me, but, by the bye," she added, laughing still more, "you thought, I'll be bound, that, mortally wounded even before my marriage, on your introduction to Matilda, and *re wounded* on your visit to Rouvray, I never had but one end, but one thought, that of joining you here or at Paris, that in my anxiety to pay court to you and to contrive long *têtes-a-têtes* with you, I valorously learnt to ride at the risk of breaking my neck, and all this to deserve one glance from you, to make you say to yourself—'Poor little woman—what devotion, what courage,' or else—'Ah! those women, those women! when one of those demons takes it into her head to seduce us, she is sure to succeed.' As for that, between ourselves, my poor cousin, you are not quite wrong—for I believe

I have seduced you to a considerable extent—only I did not do it on purpose.”

“I perceive I am not the only one who may be reproached with some vanity,” said Gontran, still more piqued.

“What!” continued Ursula, in a gayer strain than ever; “do you think one cannot form any pretensions to your heart without vanity? The confession is an edifying one, from you, too, who wish to give me a lesson of modesty. Well, then, I will own to you that though I am certain of having seduced you, I am not the least proud of it.”

“So you think me deeply in love with you?”

“I think you are more in love with me to-day than you were yesterday, and I think that you will be still more so to-morrow, than you are to-day.”

“And pray what will be the end of this continually increasing passion, most charming prophetess?”

“For me, an immense fit of laughing; for you, perhaps, all kinds of despair. For—and you ought to know this by experience, great Don Juan—if there is passion on one side, there is generally indifference or disdain on the other; and so that will prevent me from ever returning your love—that which is an irreparable disadvantage to you in my eyes, is simply—your love itself.”

“You are an excellent hand at paradoxes, madame, and I compliment you upon your prophecy.”

“It may sound paradoxical to you, but the thing is simple enough—one is so little accustomed to hear *truths*, that when one *does* hear them, they always appear paradoxes: at the risk of being taken for mad, I will tell you, then, that you are in love with me not only because I am young and pretty, but because your pride, your vanity are irritated at my not yielding to your irresistible fascinations, in spite of your past successes.”

“Madame!” exclaimed Gontran, “for heaven’s sake let us talk a little less about me.”

“You are right, cousin; we are miles off from the conversation which we were to have had together—where had we got to? Oh—ah! I recollect now; you were humbly asking my pardon for having been audacious enough to kiss the border of my cap, and clasp my waist, neither more nor less than the most forgotten of my partners in the waltz did last year.”

Instead of replying to Ursula, Gontran was silent for a moment and he then said to her, with a forced smile:—

“Doubtless, madame, you unite in yourself the rarest qualities, and you have certainly a right to shew yourself fastidious, and contemptuous; but might one at least learn with what unheard-of perfections, with what surprising advantages he must be endowed, who might aspire to the unhopèd-for happiness of pleasing you?”

"Do you know, cousin, that you are very fantastical?"

"In what?"

"Just now you requested me, pettishly enough, not to make you any longer the subject of conversation; and now, you are beginning to talk about yourself again, quite afresh."

"Talk about myself? on the contrary,—"

"When you ask me, with an irony of manner so easily seen through, 'with what supernatural gifts the man must be endowed who could please me,' do you not clearly ask me why you, yourself, do not hit my fancy at all? you, who unite so many irresistible fascinations? Well, then—you see, if I answer your question, you will be reproaching me again, as you did just now, with turning a grave conversation into amorous dissertations."

"No—no; we will resume that conversation. But come, tell me—I am very curious to know the ideal object of your dreams?"

"My ideal! and where would be the good of that, my poor cousin? It is with all these heroes who are dreamed of by young girls, as it is with answers you get at beforehand; one says just the contrary of what one meant to say, and one adores just the contrary of what one had dreamed. Nevertheless, there is one preliminary condition on which I should be untractable; the man whom I could love must be completely free, in a word—unmarried!"

"And why impose this implacable ostracism upon husbands?"

"First, because I would not condescend to reign over a heart that was shared with another—and then there is something ridiculous in a married Lovelace. He is an amphibious kind of being with something about him of a school-boy in holiday time, and a father of a family in open revolt. Besides, though you may think it stupid, I always think that a husband addicted to gallantry is an animal something like a married priest."

"The picture you draw is certainly not a flattering one," said Gontran, who could scarcely restrain himself.

"Thus, you," continued Ursula; "you, for instance, my dear cousin, have lost all your former charms—and yet—no—even if you were unmarried, you would have too much in you, and too little to seduce me. Yes, I am sure of it; for after all, what are you? a man of rank, very amiable, very clever; with a lofty, handsome person, and of irreproachable elegance. Now, between ourselves, my love would aim higher, or lower."

"Upon my word, cousin, you talk in enigmas to-day."

"Upon my word cousin, you have not your wits about you to-day. Well, then, I require either a slave, or a master: you cannot be one or the other: you love neither the unaffected devotion, which awakens an interest, nor the superiority which dazzles and subjugates. For instance, were some simple, kind, inoffensive

being to worship me with all the obstinate adoration of a savage towards his idol, I might experience towards that kindly, confiding being the same kind of affectionate compassion one feels for the poor, submissive, trembling dog, whose glance never quits you, who licks the hand that strikes him, and who is ever too happy to come crouching back as a cushion for your feet, when you have brutally driven him away, in anger or caprice. But were I ever to meet one of those men, who, by I know not what mysterious power, erect themselves into despots at the first glance, with what a humble and tender submission would I humiliate myself before him ! with what idolatry would I—I, who am so imperious—adore him in my turn ! how firmly would I rivet my thought, will, and being to *his* ! Always prostrate, always prostrate before him, my sovereign, and my god ; my joy, my grief, my hope, my despair ; all, all should have its source in him, and to him return. Let him only deign to say to me ‘*come !*’ and I would be humble, resigned, cowardly, criminal—all, and everything ! For the engrossing jealousy of *such* a love as that may rise to frenzy—to ferocity ; oh ! I shudder, I shudder at the very thought, with terror !”

As she uttered these last words in an abrupt tone, Ursula dropped her eyes upon the ground with a gloomy expression, and seemed to fall into a reverie. Gontran was astounded.

I was terrified.

After a few moments’ silence, Ursula passed her hand over her forehead as if to drive away the ideas which appeared to have saddened her, and said, with a smile to my husband, who was looking at her almost with stupefaction :—

“ You see, then, you cannot be either my slave or my master. We can be but friends, and even that would be difficult ; you are too much a man of the world to forgive me for your awkward declarations, and for your want of success with me. All steps well considered, we have only the chance left of becoming irreconcilable enemies. Don’t you think this is a very original conclusion ? who would have said that our conversation would take that turn ?”

“ Certainly, madame,” mechanically replied Gontran, as if he were still under the impression of this strange interview ; “ certainly, this is all original enough. But then, may I ask you why you have been kind enough to devote some of your time to us ?”

With that fluctuation of impressions for which she was so remarkable, Ursula burst into a fresh fit of laughter, and exclaimed, with a look of astonishment at Gontran :—

“ Come, come, cousin ; are you really going to lose your senses ? Is your reason already impaired by your passion for me ? What ! do you wish to be the object on which all my thoughts are incessantly concentrated ? You cannot understand my visit here, be-

cause the object of that visit is not to say '*I love you!*' For heaven's sake come to yourself again: it is not in the least to you, but to that dear Matilda that I intend to devote the time which I shall spend at Maran. God bless my soul! what a look you give me! What singular animals men are! If I had owned to you that I had long meditated the treacherous design of taking you away from your wife, you would have thought my infamous intentions perfectly natural; whereas, you are now quite put out at seeing *me* so scrupulously respect the sacred laws of friendship which *you* have just been invoking yourself."

"Madame"—

"Come, come, make yourself quite easy, I do not wish to make myself out better than I really am; it is much more my distaste for married men in general, and my little inclination for yourself in particular, which protects me from any temptation to do wrong. Certainly, I am passionately fond of Matilda, but yet, if some irresistible impulse had attracted me towards you, I should, in spite of myself, have acted the traitor towards my best friend. After all," continued Ursula, with one of those sarcastic smiles which gave such an insolent and contemptuous expression to her countenance, "I offer a fair, stand-up fight; I am vulnerable also myself, I also have a husband; let him be seduced by all means—all is fair in man. But we have talked nonsense enough, my good cousin, now let us converse rationally—what are the two or three words you have to say to me, and why do you keep me here? Matilda is probably waiting for me impatiently."

Gontran seemed to lose all patience at Ursula's sarcasms, and he replied, abruptly:—

"It is precisely of Matilda that I wished to speak to you, madame. Although I *am* one of those amphibious and somewhat ridiculous animals called *husbands*, my wife entertains for me an attachment as profound and sincere as it is unchangeable."

"And she is quite right, and displays excellent taste in so doing. I only speak ill of husbands as lovers; putting pretensions of that sort out of the question, they possess all kinds of charming qualities—conjugal ones at least; and you, cousin, possess in your own person, all that is necessary to fascinate your wife."

"It is because I am desirous of continuing to please my wife, madame, that I should be in despair at causing her any violent grief; she is young enough—blindly confiding enough, to love me passionately, to cling to *my* love as she does to her existence. But as *she* does not possess any of that extravagant confidence which makes people believe they must be adored—as *she*, above all, is endowed with the most enchanting modesty, she dreads certain comparisons—most dangerous ones, doubtless; and although I am—I own it with all humility—a most contemptible lover in your eyes, still she is good enough to fear"—

Ursula interrupted Gontran.

"All these fine phrases are meant to express that Matilda is jealous of me; is it not so? This is the great secret, then, after all. What a capital joke!"

"I have had the honour of informing you, madame, that nothing can be more serious. Matilda's peace of mind is precious beyond everything in my eyes."

"I am convinced of it; and you can, my dear cousin, I should fancy, re-assure her better than any one. As for me, I should be in despair at causing her the least pain on your account; it would be unpardonable. I should feel neither the pleasure of remorse, nor the pleasure which occasions it."

"Unfortunately, madame, Matilda has more than suspicions—she feels a certainty. Yesterday, after the *curés* on the terrace, she saw"—

"She saw you imprint a kiss upon my...cap! upon my word, it is delightful...I am enchanted. It just happens that I wish to punish her a little, that she may learn not to give such ready credit to appearances. Let us leave her for a day or two in her error, we will then undeceive her, and I will say to her, 'you see, naughty cousin, people should never believe their own eyes!'"

"Leave Matilda in her error, madame; why it would kill the poor girl; you do not know the noble and angelic candour of her heart; you do not know how holy and pure is the fervour of her affection for me. Ah! Matilda is not one of those cold and sarcastic women, who, because they have no feelings themselves, pretend to despise feelings which they are incapable of comprehending or appreciating. No...no; Matilda is not one of those"...

"One of those abominable women, one of those perfidious monsters who are brazen enough to refuse the husband of their intimate friend as a lover!" said Ursula, interrupting my husband, and giving way to a fresh burst of laughter.

Gontran seemed to be on the rack. Ursula continued.

"God bless my soul! how amusing you are; and how naturally the praises of poor Matilda come to the aid of your anger at my hardheartedness! Do you know that nothing less than my contempt has been able at last to call forth from your lips the praises of your wife?"

"You are right, madame," exclaimed Gontran, losing all self-command at these sarcasms. "Never, perhaps, did I better appreciate the value of her adorable heart than on discovering"...

"To what a horrible heart you wished to sacrifice her. Is that it, my dear cousin? I delight in terminating your phrases properly, we understand each other so perfectly! Seriously, however; you are quite right in preferring Matilda to me. In the first place, your conjugal fidelity will preserve me from your amorous supplica-

tions, and then, to speak frankly, my cousin is a thousand times better than I am. Is she not much more beautiful? Has she not as many precious qualities as I have faults? will there not always be an enormous distance between us? Does not her very devotion, do not her very virtues entail upon her the fatal destiny of *experiencing* passion in its greatest sincerity, in its most magnificent self-immolation, but of never *inspiring* it? while I, alas! I shall always be frightfully unhappy enough to inspire"—

"Without ever feeling it; is it so, madam?" cried Gontran. "Ah! you are right; yes, you are an infernal woman—you inspire me with fear."

Ursula shrugged her shoulders.

"Well—It is so—I shall be an infernal woman for those, who, I repeat it, are neither my slaves nor my tyrants—for such, if they are fools enough, or presumptuous enough to fall in love with me, I shall be without pity, I shall quiz them, I shall place them in the most ridiculous positions, perhaps even the most cruel ones, just as my caprice may suggest to me, the more determined they appear to be to love me, the more determined I shall shew myself to mock their passion."

"Listen, my cousin," said Gontran, to put a stop to a conversation which was disagreeable to him. "You shew such ingenuity of wit and such strength of character that I feel less and less embarrassment in coming to the point in what I have to communicate to you."

"What would you say to me?"

"That between relations and friends there are certain things which one must frankly confess, I have told you that Matilda was jealous of you—that she dreaded your presence—and that—

Gontran hesitated.

"And that she would be quiet and re-assured if I abridged my stay here."

"Excuse me, my cousin, but—

"My God! nothing can be more simple, why not have told me this at once. Poor dear Matilda, I regret however leaving her so soon, and I regret also the hunting which amused me much, perhaps also I should have regretted you too, if you had not spoken to me of love. It is really a pity, but one cannot fight against jealous suspicions—however you must allow me a few days to prepare and to bring my husband to consent to such a sudden change in our plans. I will manage all that. Ah! so you do not want me here any longer, my cousin?" said Ursula, holding out her hand to Gontran with cordiality.

"I do not want you here longer, but I confess to you I did not expect such language and such ideas from you—I seem to be dreaming."

Ursula replied with an ironical smile.

"For a young woman, who on quitting the Hotel de Maran goes to inhabit a provincial manufactory, you find me rather strange, do you not? You cannot understand me—you do not recognize the poor victim, the woman not understood who wrote such pathetic elegies to poor Matilda who cried over them, and who was right in so doing for I cried myself when I wrote them, and sometimes I cry even now."

"You—you—cry?"

"Certainly, when the wind is in the east or when there is in the air that *je ne sais quoi* which makes one ready to hang oneself, as Mademoiselle de Maran used to say."

"Always changeable, always joking," said Gontran.

"Am I not an odd woman? I speak of everything, and yet know nothing; I speak of emotions of the heart, without ever feeling them; I can assume all sorts of phisiognomies without possessing any. I am bold, mocking, frivolous, and yet, my cousin, you know only of my character just as much as I chose you should; be it good or bad you are still quite in the dark: but what you may be quite sure of, is, that I can always accomplish what I set my mind upon; for example, I have more expression than real beauty, more faults than good qualities; more boasting than real wit. I have but an ordinary fortune, a ridiculous name—Madame Sécherin! I only ask you if it is not? Madame Sécherin! well, notwithstanding all that, I mean this winter to be the woman the most sought after, the most a-la-mode in Paris—to have the most recherchée house, to turn all heads, finishing with yours. So now adieu, my cousin, I shall go and prevail on my husband to set off as soon as possible. We shall make a little tour till winter comes. I shall go to meet Matilda in the park—I shall not say a word to her about this conversation, poor woman! I pity her, poor angel! Alas! when one knows only the language of angels, one runs a great risk of being quite out of one's sphere here below. After all, I prefer my fate to hers, though she has the ineffable happiness of having you for her lord and master," added Ursula with a satirical smile.

She went out, making a little sign with her head to Gontran, and kissing her hand to him with the most coquettish malice.

And then I heard my cousin humming as she went away, with her rich and flexible voice, an air from Freischütz.

## CHAPTER. II.

## TERRORS.

HAD I doubted, for an instant, that extraordinary change which maternity had operated in the very nature of my soul, by bringing it suddenly to maturity, by revealing to it a new universe of sensations, still the ideas, the terrors, which were awakened in me at the conclusion of Ursula's interview with my husband, would have sufficed to prove clearly to me that incredible metamorphosis.

Let me be forgiven a very hackneyed—perhaps a very vulgar, comparison—that is surely an admirable instinct which reveals to the poor mother watching over her brood that yon dark and nearly imperceptible speck which can scarcely be discerned in the azure heaven, is the fierce vulture, her most deadly enemy.

Even so after Ursula's conversation with Gontran, I beheld, as it were, the germ of a fresh, of a terrible calamity in that very interview which, apparently, ought to have re-assured me.

My cousin had no attachment towards my husband; she even contemptuously ridiculed those gallant attentions of his which had caused me so much pain.

With disgusting effrontery she displayed herself to him in her true colours—perhaps even made herself out worse than she really was.

She confessed, with cynical pride, that she was only capable of being a crouching slave to the man who could subdue her, a haughty mistress to the man who might adore her, and a pitiless coquette to all those who did not either grovel at her knees, or insolently trample her in the dust.

She had also told Gontran that she should never love him, because there was something ludicrous in the passion of a married man, and because he was passionately in love with her...and yet, twice she had cast in his teeth that insolent defiance "*In spite of yourself, you will always love me!*"

Before I had a mother's feelings, I should have rushed from my hiding-place in a transport of joy and confidence; I should have thrown myself upon my knees, exclaiming, "thanks, oh God! thou hast permitted that treacherous and audacious woman to reveal herself without disguise, to shew herself in all the baseness and corruption of her heart! For an instant my husband allowed himself to be caught by her fascinating exterior, but now he knows her,

now he can feel nothing but contempt and horror towards her." What man—and especially a man like Gontran—would not feel at least his pride revolted at hearing a woman address him so contemptuously?

How could *he*—Gontran—handsome and fascinating as he is; he, who has been spoiled by so many successes, so many adorations—how could *he*, I do not say love, but even trouble himself about a woman who dared to say to him, "I do not love you, I never shall love you, and I defy you not to love me!"

Yes; again I should have thanked God, and my heart would have admitted tranquillity and peace, as guests not soon to be banished from its sanctuary—

But alas!—I said it before—in one night I had instinctively acquired that melancholy prescience, that desolating certainty of judgment, which, under ordinary circumstances, years—and years only—can bestow.

I firmly believe that I was inspired with this kind of presentiment because it might be serviceable to me in defending the futurity of my child.

Alas! God knows, I was still very young, I had never suffered myself to dwell upon the miserable secrets of the human heart, and it required a supernatural power to make me penetrate that labyrinth of horrible imaginations.

I believed in the bright side of human nature, even to blindness, I had no idea of those depraved passions which instead of seeking what is pure, exalted, salutary and possible; are, on the contrary, odiously stimulated by the attractions of a cynical and impossible corruption.

Could I suspect that a man, from the very fact of an abandoned woman's saying to him—I do not love you, I never shall love you—that a man from that very fact should madly adore that very woman?

No—no as God is my witness, had I been told that the human heart was capable of such enormities, I should have denied it with indignation as a blasphemy.

And nevertheless by what mysterious process was it, that I who had hitherto lived in such a fortunate ignorance of these infamies, that I should have felt, yes, physically felt, by the piercing anguish of my heart, that Gontran would, from that hour love that woman, not only more than he had loved his first mistresses, not only more than he loved me—but more than he would ever love again?

What secret voice whispered to me that this fatal passion would be the last—the only real passion of his existence?

What voice whispered to me, that the most inconstant, the most *blasted* men when they once *do* love, and love an abandoned woman, often love with a violence that is fearful in its intensity?

How did I feel that Ursula by her infernal management, had

brought my husband's most stimulating passions into play, by saying to him—you are handsome and fascinating, you are used to triumphs, and yet *I* laugh at you, and yet you will love me, and that love will be, for *me* an inexhaustible source of ridicule— for *you* an inexhaustible source of suffering !

And even this was not enough for that woman. It was necessary for her to fan Gontran's love into a blaze by kindling his jealousy, and so she took care to convince him that she would not be to *all*, contemptuous, cold, and sarcastic as she was to *him*.

Mark—mark then, with what a passionate, what a delirious ardour she described to him the tempest burst of emotion which would overthrow her reason and transport her senses, at the mere approach of the man whom she loved—

Mark the wildness of her glance, mark how her cheek reddened, how her bosom heaved, at those words of burning and sensual delirium—

And when she spoke of her idolatry for the man who would rule her like a tyrant, with what a humble and submissive gracefulness did she bend her fascinating head ! Was she not a transporting picture, kneeling, with clasped hands, and imploring one smile from her master, while she rivetted upon him her great blue eyes drowned in a flood of languor, melancholy, and passion !

Alas ! alas ! the seductive fascination possessed by that woman, must have been most powerful, most irresistible, for me, her rival, for me, a mother, for me, who looked upon that creature with horror, to feel at that moment and instinctively understand, that not only Gontran, but any man in the world perhaps, would become violently enamoured of Ursula, so great was the enchantment, so powerful the charms which she possessed !

No ! no ! God did not deceive me when he inspired those frightful presentiments ! It was in his infinite compassion that he pointed out to me the formidable tempest which was gathering in the horizon, so that a poor mother, feeble and unprotected, might, if not avoid, at least perchance divert the fearful misfortunes which menaced her.

I had hardly strength to emerge from the closet in which I had been concealed.

I found Gontran sitting in an arm chair, his eyes fixed upon vacancy, his arms folded across his chest, and his whole attitude denoting a profound stupefaction. I was obliged to press his shoulder gently, in order to recall him to himself.

He lifted his head with a hasty movement and merely uttered these few words in a deep and impressive accent.

"What a woman !—what a woman !—Oh ! she must leave the house, Matilda, she must leave the house !"

Those words confirmed my suspicions, for in Gontran's mouth, who

was always so remarkable for his self-command, they possessed a fearful significance—either he loved that woman, or he feared that he should love her.

An idea, which at first I welcomed as an inspiration from heaven, impelled me to tell Gontran what I knew of Ursula's intrigue with M. Chopinelle, the last being, doubtless, classed by her in the category of her slaves.

I did not for a minute doubt that the annoyance of having failed in a quarter where so ludicrous a personage had succeeded, would inspire Gontran with an irresistible aversion for Ursula—perhaps my husband would have set a higher value upon the conquest of Ursula from his belief that he was the first man who had inspired any attachment in her heart.

I wished also to acquaint my husband with what treachery and perfidiousness Ursula had brought about the rupture between M. Sécherin and his mother.

I was going to tell him everything when I was seized with a sudden hesitation, and I asked myself if the revelations would not stimulate still more Gontran's passion, and if his vanity would not be still more brought into play by the annoyance of having been less favourably treated, than a ridiculous and vulgar provincial.

And then he might still believe Ursula to be virtuous, notwithstanding the theoretical effrontery which she proclaimed, and so resign himself more easily to the non-attainment of her affection, from the belief that no one had been more fortunate than himself. But I feared lest this conviction should lend, perhaps, a still greater attraction to my cousin in his eyes.

Agitated as I was by so many contending perplexities I resigned myself to wait for the inspiration of the moment.

My husband had again fallen into a kind of reverie.

I took his hand, pressed it tenderly and said to him.

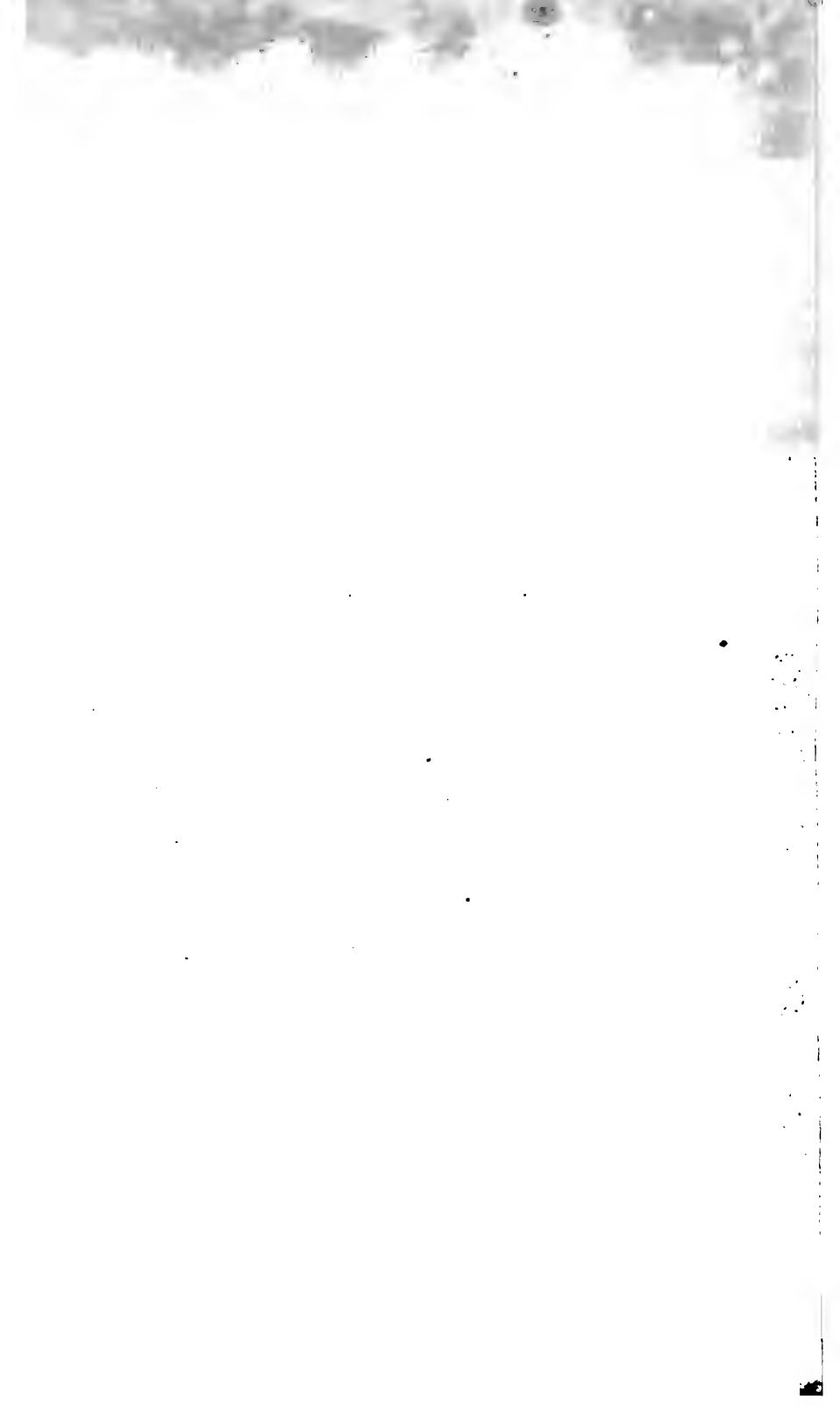
"Thanks—thanks, my noble Gontran, you told me the truth indeed. At least Ursula will leave us and we shall be tranquil and happy once more."

Gontran smiled with an expression of bitterness, and replied—"you must have been delighted at hearing me, treated in the way I was by Ursula, I hope your mind is quite at ease now?"

Determined not to let Gontran ever suspect my fears, I said to him.

"Certainly, dearest, I am quite re-assured; but I do not see in what way my cousin treated you so ill; besides, she was in joke."

"In joke? And even if she had been in joke, was not her treatment of me contemptuous in the highest degree? Never, no, never in the whole course of my existence, was I so insolently ridiculed; and there I was like a fool, without finding a word to say for myself! What conduct! What effrontery!"





*Flower & Co. Paris*

A visit from Mademoiselle de Maran

"But Gontran, it seems to me that the most cruel thing which Ursula said to you was, that she should never love you, and that she defied you *not* to love *her*."

"Well, is that nothing?"

"Nothing certainly, since you love me Gontran, your tenderness for me prevents your feeling any love for her, and her not loving you, must be a matter of indifference in your eyes."

"Certainly, certainly, you are right my poor Matilda, I love *you*, oh! yes, I *do* love you! *you* are kind and generous! *you* have a heart, and an elevated and magnanimous one, while your cousin—I just ask yourself, what, after all, is there pleasing about her? A piquant face, a perfect figure, certainly, a remarkably pretty foot, and large eyes, impudent at one moment, and languishing at the next; a vein of impertinent mockery, and an inexhaustible supply of effrontery, but neither heart nor soul; and besides, an accomplished actress, and as false as the devil! The more I think of it, the less can I overcome my astonishment. Would you have expected this from a person so melancholy and dolorous as she always appeared to be? Certainly I have seen very bold women, indeed, complete female-*rouées*—if you will permit me the expression—but—but I never met *her* equal; I am perfectly confounded at her. Ah! how I should love to subdue and tame such a disposition as that! with what delight would I then give her back contempt for contempt, sarcasm for sarcasm!" involuntarily exclaimed my husband.

I hid my face in my hands, and burst into tears, without uttering a word.

I had no longer any room for doubt; Ursula had struck home.

Gontran was so absorbed in his reflections that he did not perceive my tears.

He hastily rose from his seat, and pacing up and down the room, continued:—

"Ah! I can well conceive that a man should be without compassion, when he has succeeded in mastering one of those haughty and insolent dispositions. Then, with what delight does one humiliate, nay, even outrage them! for well do those creatures, hitherto so arrogant, deserve it!" then, with a forced laugh, he went on. "Really, her pretensions are enough to make one die with laughing! Madame Sécherin, of all people in the world! Madame Sécherin wanting to become the fashion, to have the best establishment at Paris, and to laugh at everybody! Ha, ha, ha, Upon my word it is highly amusing. Don't you think it extremely diverting? But what is the matter? you are crying, Matilda!"

"Ah! Gontran, that interview will be fatal to us."

"What do you mean?"

"Ursula did not utter one word that has not left an impression of annoyance and bitterness on your heart."

"Annoyance, bitterness, because Madame Sécherin says that I am not fortunate enough to please her! Why, my love, what can you be thinking of? What do you take me for? I have no great vanity, but still I do not conceive whatever merit I may possess, to be at all seriously affected by the contempt of Madame Sécherin. Only what seems to me an admirable joke, is, her pretending to make me in love with her. My poor Matilda! I made my confession to you, and you see I told you the truth. I thought Ursula a pretty little woman, and my gallantry carried me a little farther than I had intended; but it was never more than a somewhat lively caprice on my part. After all, there is nothing particular about the woman, nothing, absolutely nothing. In love with her indeed! I'm sure I pity the poor devils who are fools enough to suffer themselves to be caught in her nets. In love with her! why it would be hell itself! with such a disposition. In love with her! I—I—"

And then, Gontran, hastily changing his manner, said, with what seemed to me a forced and wandering expression:—

"I in love with her! as if I had not by my side one a thousand times better than her; as if I had not the best, the most devoted of women; an angel of gentleness and goodness! Poor Matilda! how could you for one instant dread the comparison? You—you—"

And he fell once more into a kind of reverie. The last praises which he bestowed upon me made me suffer most acutely.

They recalled to my mind that odious expression of Ursula to my husband, "you would never think of boasting of your wife if I did not openly profess my indifference towards you."

My cousin was right; the praises which Gontran bestowed upon me were extorted from him by the annoyance which he felt.

In placing me so far above my cousin, he thought more of injuring *her* than of flattering *me*.

"What is most important for us," I said to my husband, "is Ursula's speedy departure from Maran; she will easily persuade M. Sécherin to go away."

"Certainly, certainly; let her go away, and the sooner the better."

"Dearest," I said to Gontran, after a moment's silence, "allow me to speak to you with the utmost frankness."

"I am all attention, my love."

"Do you not think it strange, that this interview—which ought to have completely re-assured me, since it justified you in my eyes—should produce a contrary effect upon you and me?"

"What do you mean? I do not understand you."

"Ursula asserted that she did not love you, that she never should love you; that your gallantry was not of the least consequence, and that she would go away as soon as possible. And yet you see that I am weeping—and yet you cannot conceal your agitation."

"God bless my soul!" impatiently exclaimed Gontran; "it is the simplest thing in the world. You are crying because anything or nothing makes you cry; I am agitated because there are certain things which, in spite of oneself, *will* wound one's self-love. And what do you conclude from that? Are you going to make yourself an echo of Ursula, and say, like her, that I am, or shall be, in love with her? It is perfectly absurd, only I will own to you that she put me out of patience; I am not accustomed to be ridiculed in that manner, that's all. There are a thousand different ways of saying things. She might simply have said—'I have played the coquette a little towards you, let us forget it all and remain good friends; if my presence excites Matilda's jealousy I will go away.' Nothing could have been better; but what was the use of her expounding her principles as she did? and *such* principles too! What was the use of telling me, with such effrontery, that if I do not please her, others perhaps, will? What was the use of expressing, in a manner so full of passion—to say the least of it, the transport she should feel on such or such an occasion? Incomprehensible woman! At that minute she really seemed quite moved. Upon my word I cannot make her out; she is a perfect enigma, that creature, a perfect enigma. But let somebody else than me amuse himself with trying to solve it; I wish him joy of it! And to crown all she has quite an iron resolution. She took in into her head to learn to ride, and she rides like an Amazon; she has taken it into her head to be a woman of fashion next winter, and she is likely enough to succeed, she has all the requisites for the part."

"You were of the contrary opinion just now, dearest; you said that this was quite a ridiculous pretension of hers."

"God bless my soul! my love, if you are always coming with your commentaries upon every word I utter, it will become intolerable at last," said my husband, impatiently stamping his foot. "I am talking to you in full confidence, in complete security; do not then keep hunting for something else in my words than what I actually say."

I looked at Gontran with a painful surprise.

"Dearest, I will only make one observation. Since the conclusion of that interview, you have conversed incessantly about Ursula, and have not once had a thought for our child."

My husband passed his hands across his forehead, and exclaimed, with emotion:—

"My poor, excellent wife! it is too true. Ah! I have been to blame...much to blame; forgive me, Matilda. Believe me, those few words of yours recall me to my duties, to my affections; those few words calm me, and console me for the foolish and ridiculous wound which my self-love has suffered. Well, then...yes, forgive me this last glimmering of pride. Yes, I felt, in spite of myself, a little piqued at not having made the least impression on Ursula. Do you know why? Because the sacrifice I should have had to make to you would have been a greater one. Believe me, nothing will be easier for me than to forget that diabolical woman. You are right, my angel, my beloved and guardian angel; our child...let us think of our child. Between that delicious hope, and my love for you...for you, who henceforth will be re-assured as to my affection...happiness will to us indeed be easy of attainment. Once more, forgive me for having taken Ursula's sarcasms to heart; but you must remember, that she ridiculed me in your presence...and I do not conceal from you, Matilda, that I am excessively proud of myself, since I belong to you. And yet...as you love me just as well after all, do you not?...we will think no more of that ridiculous scene, except to laugh heartily ourselves at me, or still better, let us talk about our child, and that sweet topic will be to us a certain refuge against all these evil thoughts."

The arrival of one of our tenants who wished to speak to my husband, put an end to this conversation.

Gontran left the room.

My first impulse was to be enchanted at the delightful words which he had just spoken with all his habitual gracefulness of manner; then I fancied that his accent had been nervous and abrupt, and that his looks did not accord with his language. One would have said he was trying to force himself to forget his own situation, or to re-assure me by a few tender expressions.

And yet, there was something of touching emotion in his accent.

Nevertheless, the more I reflected upon the impression which Ursula had made upon him, the more I believed in the imminence of the danger.

A few days before I should have wept...oh! how I should have wept...and then have attempted some timid and fruitless complaints; but now, called to fulfil fresh duties, I was determined to change my plan of conduct completely.

I understood that now I had reason to dread any violent bursts of sorrow, for the re-action might be fatal to my child; I determined, then, to try henceforth never to fret myself about trifles, to steel myself against my own susceptibility, to harden myself against moral sufferings, and to be...if I may use such an expression...extremely sober in my grief.

The present state of circumstances was calculated to put my new

resolution to a rude trial.

I dried my tears, and coolly reflected upon my position.

From that moment, in order to be no longer crushed by the ruins of my hopes, I resolutely contemplated life under its most sombre aspects.

I do not deceive myself as to the cause of this courageous resolution ; I possessed a treasure of happiness and hope, which nothing in the world could snatch from me.

Whatever might be the future, my child remained to me ; for I felt a profound, an unmoveable conviction that God had sent me that supreme consolation in my sorrows, as a holy recompense of my devotion to my duties.

This blind faith in the divine protection prevented my ever entertaining the slightest serious fear for the future existence of that little being who rendered my existence a double one, and who was destined to make me forget many sufferings. I traced out for myself a plan of conduct from which I firmly resolved never to deviate.

A week would be sufficient for Ursula to persuade her husband to leave Maran ; if, at the end of that week she was not gone ; if in the interim I acquired the conviction that her affected disdain was merely a treacherous manoeuvre of her coquetry, I was determined to follow the counsels of Madame de Richeville.

Once alone with Gontran, I hoped by my tenderness, and by the situation in which I now found myself and which would of necessity lend me an interest in his eyes...I hoped, I say, to drive Ursula from his thoughts.

If not ; if his passion for her increased from the obstacles which opposed it—if I was defeated after having long struggled against that woman's execrable influences with all the strength of my love and my devotion, I should in my defeat preserve at least my dignity ; my child would be left me, and for that child only would I continue to exist.

It is impossible to describe the calmness and confidence with which this resolution inspired me. I no longer experienced those vague terrors, those unreasonable yet unbounded sufferings which I had done ; and why ? because before, after the loss of Gontran's love, nothing was left me, nothing but an infinite despair, nothing but a miserable and barren existence, nothing but some dim memories which would only serve to render by comparison the present still more cruel.

I fell on my knees and thanked God for not having suffered me to slumber on in a fatal confidence.

Without meaning to play the paltry part of a spy, I resolved to lose no opportunity of enlightening myself as to the state of affairs.

## CHAPTER. III.

## MADEMOISELLE DE MARAN.

THE day after the scene I have described, what was my astonishment at receiving a few lines from Mademoiselle de Maran! She wrote me word that she should arrive almost as soon as her letter, and that she would tell me *herself* the reason of her coming.

Really, one might almost have said that this woman had been warned by a secret instinct of the fresh sorrows which were overwhelming me, and that she was coming to gloat over my tortures.

Had I not known Mademoiselle de Maran so well, I should have been astonished at her audacity in coming to visit me, remembering as I did, that the last time we had met, she did not conceal the hatred she entertained for me.

I was, moreover, terrified at the idea of her meeting Ursula.

If, in her vile maliciousness she had hoped, foreseen, and calculated that Ursula, sooner or later becoming mixed up with my existence, would some day be my enemy; she would naturally be satisfied with the turn events had taken, and might be an ally—and a very useful one—of my cousin's.

I reflected with bitterness that the usages of society rendered it incumbent upon one to receive one's most deadly enemies under one's roof, either under the pretext of relationship, or connections which only serve to render their animosity still more odious.

I informed Gontran of my aunt's approaching arrival. He seemed but little interested by the intelligence.

I was far from sharing his tranquillity. Such an expedition was so much out of Mademoiselle de Maran's way—who had not quitted Paris for fifteen years—that I suspected she had some serious motive in undertaking it.

About two o'clock my aunt arrived, accompanied by Servien, one of her maids, a footman, whom she employed as *courier*, and a wolf-dog who had succeeded Felix.

We stood on the steps of the château to receive Mademoiselle de Maran.

She got out of the carriage with tolerable activity, did not seem in the least changed, and still wore her gown and bonnet of *carmélite* silk.

Notwithstanding the melancholy reflections which occupied me, I could not help smiling with surprise at seeing Mademoiselle de Maran's bonnet decorated with a tricolor bow; while Servien's hat was adorned with an enormous cockade of the same patriotic colours.

My aunt perceived my astonishment, and exclaimed, as soon as she entered the drawing-room:—

"You are wondering, I dare say, that I have not already thundered forth for your edification the *Marseillaise*, *Ca ira*; or the *Parisienne*—a fresh patriotic, radical, emblematic, and Orleanitish ditty, which is quite as valuable as the other pastorals of the Republic. Pray tell me, *citoyen and citoyenne*, don't I look like some famous Amazon or victrix of July with my tricolor ribbons? Perhaps you think I am come to announce to you that my marriage with M. de La Fayette is to come off on the first *sans-culottide of frimaire*; to use the beautiful Republican calender—before the altar of the country? Well, you are just mistaken there. There, they are under my feet, these fine tricolor ribbons; there, they are in the fire," said my aunt, tearing the bow from her bonnet and throwing it into the fire-place after having stamped upon it with a kind of comical fury.

"Bravo, madame," said Gontran, with a loud laugh; "I began to think you had made it up with the government!"

"What do you mean with your '*made it up*'? Have you taken it into your head to laugh at me, pray, Monsieur de Lancry? Be pleased to believe then, that if I consented to fig myself out with those execrable colours, which actually stink of the people, the empire, and the guillotine, it was only that I might travel in peace and quietness."

"And your royalist feelings did not revolt at such a concession, madame?" said Gontran.

"And pray what have my royalist feelings got to do with the matter? One don't stop to consider what the means are which ensure one's safety, provided it is ensured, does one? In the days of *citoyen Cartouche*, and *citoyen Mandrin*, do you suppose I should have had any scruples in using one of those gentlemen's passes, in order to get through their hands without any danger? Well, then, that abominable cockade, and this passport—stamped with an absurd Gallic cock, which looks for all the world like a fat *citoyen* of Maine—are only used by me as *passes*. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, madame; but to what fortunate hazard are we indebted for your visit?"

"You must know then, my good fellow, that they are going to judge—that is of course to say, condemn—those poor devils of ministers; there are riots every day at Paris; people are talking of plundering the *hôtels*, in short, of a second 93. I have crammed my plate into a hiding-place which the devil himself could not find out, I have brought my diamonds and five thousand louis with me in the sword case of my carriage, and I have come here to wait till I see how affairs turn out. If all becomes quiet again I shall return to Paris, if the hubbub increases I shall emigrate into England

once more ; but for the present Paris is too hot to hold me. All my set have taken fright and posted off as well they might. Some have followed the poor old King and the Dauphiness, others are gone into La Vendée to wait for *Madame*...and thank God, they will find plenty of work for some time for these new fangled *blues* ...and the rest are playing at "the devil take the hindmost!" and have hurried off, some into Italy, and some into Germany, just as it was during the first Revolution. To tell you the truth, I was getting bored at Paris, when, by way of a change, I had an attack of fright to lend wings to my feet, and this, my dear children, has procured me the advantage of coming here to embrace you. I like so much to contemplate your pretty little establishment. It quite does my heart good. I say to myself, when I see it—After all, it is thanks to me that those two fond hearts, which were so well formed for one another, are united by a chain of roses! Ha! ha! ha! what a wonderful effect the air of the country has to be sure; I am already actually talking eclogues. Pray where are your pipes, my handsome Corydon? I should like to sing your happiness to the double flute patronised by the shepherds of Arcadia!"

I was terrified at Mademoiselle de Maran's gaiety; her harsh and bitter laugh was always the forerunner of some piece of malice.

My aunt, as she always did, had put on her spectacles when she entered the room, although she was not going to read or work, but they served to hide her glances—if the expression may be allowed—and, sheltered by their glasses, she was able to observe everything at her ease, without being herself remarked.

I perceived that while she talked, she was attentively examining my countenance and that of my husband.

"And Ursula," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "have you heard anything of her lately?"

"She has been here for some days, with her husband, madame," I replied.

"You don't say so? Oh, dear! we are quite a family party then! Bless me; I have made my appearance quite *à propos*! But where is my dear Ursula, then?"

"She is out walking with M. Sécherin, but she will soon be in, I hope," said Gontran.

"Out walking with her husband!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, "and I find you here with your wife, Gontran? Why really this favoured spot is quite the promised land, the Canaan of married life; it is perfectly prodigious—a kind of patriarchal existence that is quite touching! But walking alone with her husband? upon my word, that is very good of her, for that husband of hers is the greatest nincompoop alive, and has no more conversation than an ostrich! But tell me, my dear children, are they

still as devoted to each other as ever? do they still go on with their amours and touching reciprocity of *Bellotte* and *great duck*?"

"You will find Ursula much changed, madame," I said to Mademoiselle de Maran, with a bitter smile.

"Changed? An't she as pretty as she used to be?"

"Oh, yes, madame; she is still a charming person, but her disposition has become developed—she is now much less subject to melancholy."

"Ha! ha! ha! I laugh in spite of myself," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "when I think how blinded I was by my partiality for you, Matilda. Do you remember how I was always scolding Ursula on every possible occasion, and how ugly I used to call her? There is no harm in my telling you all this now, my dear children. Well, then, I was horridly unjust; on the contrary, I really think her a clever and charming person and—one may say this before a husband, since that is nothing to what these married gentlemen say when their wives are not there—well, then, I thought Ursula had more expression of countenance, and was a more winning kind of person, than you, my dear Matilda. And yet it was my love for you, and my wish to praise you at the expense of your cousin, that made me tell all those horrid lies. Wasn't I deceitful, eh? that is to say wasn't I good-natured? for when my affection for a person carries me away, there's nothing I'm not capable of. But for all this, don't go, my dear girl, to fancy that you are less beautiful than Ursula; on the contrary, no one can deny that you are a thousand times handsomer. She can't rival you in regularity of features, but still she has that I know not what—that excitement, that piquancy, that fascination, which turns the heads of all that sort of rascals," and she pointed to Gontran with a loud laugh.

Then, turning towards me, she half whispered, laughing all the time:—

"Tell me, now, an't you a little jealous of this infernal Ursula? you should be on your guard against these Agneses, who smile like the penitent Magdalen, and ogle like Venus Aphrodite!"

If my aunt had calculated every word with the most industrious malice, she could not have wounded me more cruelly.

This circumstance convinced me that hazard is often favourable to odious dispositions as well as to generous ones.

Both are often served by some strange fatality.

Gontran, himself, notwithstanding his self-possession, was as much embarrassed as myself by Mademoiselle de Maran's painful pleasantries, and he could merely stammer out, with a forced smile:—

"Do you think then, madame, that it would be possible for me to be faithless to my dear Matilda? Are we not, as you yourself said, a model of conjugal happiness?"

"Don't you see I'm only in joke, you good-for-nothing rake, you? I should just like to hear of your being faithless to her, that's all! In the country it would be inexcusable; at Paris it is a different thing—the intoxication of the world—*opportunity—a tender fair one*—for instance, some one like the beautiful Princess Ksernika. *but here*; oh, fie! fie! Poor little Matilda! you, too, who have always been so good to Gontran—in all the business of that abominable Lugarto, for example."

I turned pale; Gontran started as if he had been bitten by a serpent, and said to Mademoiselle de Maran:—

"For heaven's sake, madame, do not let us talk of that! Do not recall that painful scene."

"Not talk of that, indeed! Why what a horrid ungrateful fellow you must be! I tell you I *will* talk of it then; I will talk of it from morning till night. Where would you find, I should like to know, a woman, who, in order to fascinate her husband's creditor, runs the risk of losing her own character? Why, my good fellow, such an action is perfectly sublime!

"Madame," exclaimed Gontran, "it is an infamous calumny, and I told that wretch so publicly, and to the face of all."

"God bless my soul! I know very well that it is a calumny, my dear children; I know very well that Matilda is as pure and innocent as a young swan, just emerging from its snow-white shell, but"—

I perceived to what point Mademoiselle de Maran was desirous of leading the conversation; I accordingly interrupted her, and said, addressing her with a firmness that astonished her as much as it did Gontran;—

"You have done us the honour, madame, of coming to pay us a visit—an honour certainly unexpected—we shall always be delighted to have you here, and we shall never forget that this house once belonged to your brother, we will do all in our power to receive you with every attention, but at least we may hope, madame, that you will not busy yourself with recalling past events, the remembrance of which is very painful both to myself and my husband."

"But, my dear girl"—

"But, madame," I continued, in a louder voice, and once more interrupting Mademoiselle de Maran. "But, madame, since you have chosen to forget the motives which to all appearance should for ever have prevented our meeting again on a footing of such intimacy, at least we may be permitted to hope that not a word shall be said of those calumnies, to which you so complaisantly play the part of echo. I think this is not too great a sacrifice to require from you; if you will oblige us so far, madame, we shall be extremely grateful to you, and you will perhaps find some

pleasure in seeing those happy and united, whom—involuntarily, doubtless—you would have set at variance and divided !”

My self-possession and calmness had a singular and unexpected effect upon Mademoiselle de Maran and Gontran.

My aunt, after a few minutes' silence, ironically continued, with a look at Gontran :—

“ It is Matilda, then, *now* who says *we* ? What, my poor viscount, has the lance resigned its authority to the distaff ?”

“ Matilda speaks a little for me and a good deal for herself, madame,” said Gontran. “ I join with her in imploring you to forget events, the memory of which can but sadden us, but I do not take the liberty of imposing conditions on your stay in our house,” added Gontran, with a severe glance at me.

Although I did not expect to see my husband take my aunt's part against me, I still kept up my courage. Satisfied with, and surprised myself at the firmness of my own language, I said :—

“ The only conditions, I impose, madame, relate to my own presence in this house. I have had the honour of telling you that I shall always remember that you are my father's sister, and that you are a guest here in M. de Lancry's house. Should I unfortunately find it impossible to tolerate certain pleasantries on your part, I should request you to excuse my departure. M. de Lancry would be kind enough to do you the honours of Maran, and I can assure you, I should instantly set out for Paris.”

I had expressed myself with so much resolution that Mademoiselle de Maran exclaimed :—

“ Bless my soul ! she'd do it as soon as say it. Why, my poor Gontran, I do not know your wife again ; what *has* happened to her ?”

“ What has happened, madame, is simply this : I *absolutely* require rest from suffering, and I am determined henceforth to avoid all the painful emotions which I possibly can.”

“ Hey day ! you are coming out strong, my dear girl ; it seems to me you are going to become quite a coddle, and to take great care of yourself.”

“ Yes madame ; it is necessary that I should *take great care of myself*, as you are pleased to observe.”

Notwithstanding Gontran's pre-occupation, a tender look of his convinced me that I was understood by him.

Mademoiselle de Maran ironically continued :—

“ Well then, my dear girl, it is all settled and we will establish a programme of the topics that are forbidden, me : Firstly, Lugarto and the calumnies relative to the said Lugarto. Secondly, Gontran's intrigue with the beautiful Princess Keernika. Thirdly, any comparison which might seem to insinuate that I think Ursula a more piquant personage than you. Fourthly, in short,

all allusions to the attentions which, in the due course of nature that rake Gontran might be tempted to pay to Ursula, to the damage of that fool M. Sécherin, who, between ourselves, will lose nothing by waiting. But, bless me! there he is, there he is Lord, how lucky."

M. Sécherin at that moment entered the drawing-room with his wife.

"Dear me—dear me," he joyously exclaimed, "here is that good Mademoiselle de Maran."

"Myself in flesh and blood, my good M. Sécherin, and I was talking about you at that very minute. How d'ye do, Ursula, how d'ye do! my dear girl," said Mademoiselle de Maran getting up to kiss Ursula on the forehead. "I am delighted at seeing you and Matilda together. That is just what I used to dream of, to see you living together like two sisters, and leaving each other as seldom as possible."

"And not even leaving one another at all, if possible," exclaimed M. Sécherin. "There is nothing like a family life, is there Mademoiselle de Maran? you can understand that, you who are the cream of good natured women."

"Ah—ha! Monsieur Sécherin, I shall begin scolding you again, I give you notice if you go on calling one the "*cream*" of anything. In the first place it hurts my modesty, and then it might compromise me as being an aristocrat. You are a nice fellow with your "*cream*" Monsieur Sécherin! Do you suppose any of those distinctions exists now after the glorious days of July, which have established equality, fraternity and liberty? Call me a good woman as much as you like, but no more of your "*cream*," or I shall revolt."

"Well, well, let it be good woman then, but you are a famously good one indeed, so good," added M. Sécherin, suddenly becoming serious, "so good that you put me in mind of my poor mother, just as my poor mother used to put me in mind of you."

"That comparison of yours pays a great compliment both to me, and madame your mother, and above all is a proof of your excellent judgment, my good Monsieur Sécherin. But you have not lost her, I hope?"

"No, no, thank God. but a good many things have happened since I saw you, I can tell you."

"You don't say so? pray tell me all about it, you know what an interest I take in everything that concerns you. What is the matter, my poor Monsieur Sécherin?"

In vain did Ursula, who dreaded the indiscretion of her husband, make him sign after sign, he did not perceive her and continued.

"God bless my soul! yes, we have separated from mamma."

"Impossible! my poor dear fellow, separated from your mamma. And wherefore, in the Lord's name?"

"Because mamma had taken a dislike to Ursula, and had got it into her head that poor Bellotte was too thick with Chopinelle, our *sous préfet*, who, by the bye, has lost his place by the Revolution of July."

Mademoiselle de Maran's countenance, which had hitherto worn a comical and sarcastic expression, became suddenly dignified and severe, and she said to M. Sécherin.

"To doubt the virtue of Ursula, would be to doubt the morality of the education which I have bestowed, and the solidity of the principles which I have impressed upon her. Your mother, Monsieur Sécherin, must have been cruelly prejudiced against Ursula to admit such an infamous idea. You know that I am not a person to be blinded by my attachment to any one. Well then, I now and always will guarantee you Ursula's regularity of conduct, however much appearances may be against her never believe those appearances—for that charming girl loves you even more than she allows you to discover."

"Ah! madame, your words are always fated to be balm of Gilead to me!" exclaimed M. Sécherin. "Never in my life did I have doubts of Ursula, I give you my honour I never did, but had I doubted her virtue, what you have just told me would destroy my suspicions however deep rooted they might be."

"Madame," said Ursula, "you are too kind, too indulgent."

"Not at all, I am merely just, I pay the homage that is due to merit—it delights me so much to see you so happy together. You have no idea how it enchants me, you two happy couples getting on so well with each other, I cannot tell you how it touches me. And what delights me most in your intimacy is to think that it is nothing yet to what it will be, and that that the longer you live the more closely united you will become; so closely united that, upon my soul, one shan't be able to distinguish one from the other; it will be a kind of Socialist establishment, a sort of mutual and pleasant intermixture, after the fashion of Otaheite, or the golden age, when everybody's property was everybody's else's, eh, my good Monsieur Sécherin?"

"True enough, madame," he replied with a laugh, "only, I and my wife shall gain too much by that bargain."

"Come, none of your modesty, *you* gain too much indeed! Is this the way to talk among friends? And besides doesn't each contribute his own share? A'n't you and your wife like brother and sister with Matilda? if Gontran looks upon your wife as he would his own, doesn't your wife in *her* turn love Gontran quite as much as she does you? Why are you gabbling about how much *you* will gain then?"

"You are right, madame, you are right," gaily exclaimed M. Sécherin, "if we each of us bring the heart and the devotion into a *joint stock company* like this, to use an expression employed by manufacturers like myself—we bring all we can bring, and that gives us all a right to an equal portion of happiness."

"Did you ever hear anything like him?" said Mademoiselle de Maran, clapping her hands, "that's all I ask you, *did* you ever hear anything like him! Upon my word his commercial and *joint stock* simile is delicious! I suppose Ursula inspires you with all these pretty ideas? There is nothing after all like the influence of a virtuous young woman! how it polishes you up and sets you off. Certainly, my good Monsieur Sécherin, you already possessed many excellent qualities, but there was something—I can hardly say what—wanting, something of finish, delicacy, and distinction in your way of expressing yourself, which now you possess to perfection. You are no longer like the same man, your roughness, your primitive frankness have become modified and softened down by an urbanity which is full of gracefulness and delicacy. But you needn't plume yourself upon it I can tell you, for *you* have nothing at all to do with it."

"How is that, madame?"

"Why certainly, if you are so changed, it is no more your fault than it is the fault of the sweet briar when it becomes a rose tree. You are merely and simply the work of that delicious little gardener—Ursula. She has *grafted* you, my good Monsieur Sécherin, she has grafted you."

"Upon my word, it is a very just comparison," exclaimed M. Sécherin, "she *has* grafted me—I am *grafted*."

"Certainly you are, dear sir, and doubly grafted too I can tell you," said Mademoiselle de Maran, looking at Ursula with so malicious a smile, that I understood there must be some insulting *double entendre* in my aunt's joke.

"After all," said M. Sécherin with simplicity, "perhaps you are only laughing at me. Now tell me really, *am* I changed to my advantage?"

"My good Monsieur Sécherin," gravely replied my aunt, "I have perhaps but one good quality in the world, and that is a veracity—which is almost brutal. Why then should I tell you this, if I did not mean it? Did I ever mince matters with you, when I had to find fault with your manner of expressing yourself?"

"No; I must allow you never did. Well, then! after all, I *do* believe you, and *will* believe you, because if I *am* changed, to my advantage; it is, as you say, thanks to Ursula—but I had never perceived this change."

"This timid and enchanting modesty confirms still more what I

said, my good Monsieur Sécherin ; but I shall hold my tongue, for fear of rendering Ursula too conceited with herself and you. Now, then ; I must leave you ; I shall ask Matilda to shew me my room, for I am a little tired with my journey—not to mention that those abominable tricolors have turned me quite sick. Fortunately, the tranquillity of the country, and the sight of the happy people I have made, all this will soon set me up again. Come, come ; I will leave you all to the enjoyment of your own sweet selves, for I am jabbering away here like a magpie who has tumbled out of its nest."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD.

UNABLE to divine the real cause of Mademoiselle de Maran's sudden arrival, I endeavoured to persuade myself that no other motive existed for her visit than that which she had assigned, especially as the newspapers which we received from Paris spoke of serious disturbances as existing in that city.

Nevertheless my aunt's terrors seemed to me exaggerated ones. On the hand, if I admitted the existence of any other reason for her visit to Maran, I became frightened in spite of myself, for her presence was always to me, an omen of some fresh misfortune.

I watched Gontran attentively ; he was absent, pre-occupied, and plunged in thought.

Ursula had several times avoided a *tête-à-tête* with me ; and I longed for her departure.

I did not know whether she had prepared and disposed her husband to leave Maran, and I mentioned the subject several times to Gontran, who told me that my cousin had assured him she was obliged to act with great circumspection, in order to break off plans which had so long a time been determined upon, but that she hoped to succeed in doing so within a few days.

I had not chosen to tell Ursula or Mademoiselle de Maran the situation in which I found myself ; it was a happiness which I wished to enjoy alone, and to keep secret as long as possible.

My aunt continued to laugh at M. Sécherin, and appeared to watch Ursula and my husband with great attention.

She kept faithfully to her promise, and talked no more of a past which awakened such painful remembrances in my mind. She, doubtless, knew that I should have resolution enough to act as I had said I would, and to quit Maran sooner than put up with fresh insults.

She had too much sagacity, too much penetration, not to perceive the remarkable change which had taken place in Gontran's demeanour. He, who had formerly been so gay, brilliant, and animated, had now become thoughtful, and moody, at times hasty and impatient, at others, melancholy and oppressed. My uneasiness increased daily; I feared that, in accordance with my presentiment, his inclination for my cousin would assume the character of a complete passion, from the very fact of its being thwarted and irritated by her affected indifference.

I now once more remarked upon his contracted features that gloomy and nervous smile, which had not darkened his countenance since he had escaped from the influence of M. Lugarto,

Several times I came unexpectedly upon him as he was striding up and down the park with hasty steps—and once I saw he had been crying. He seldom spoke to me with harshness, on the contrary his manner towards me displayed unusual tenderness.

Alas! these returns to kinder feelings convinced me but too well, that he was wretched.

When Ursula was in the room with my husband and myself, she affected a wildness of spirits which increased still more the melancholy of Gontran. She displayed almost the same cynical raillery which she had given vent to during her interview with my husband; only, out of respect to M. Sécherin's presence, instead of proclaiming those sentiments as her own, she attributed them to an imaginary being, to some I know not what heroine of romance, some thorough demon whose existence she amused herself with imagining.

I cannot deny it, Ursula, in those conversations, continued to display an infinity of wit, and to shew herself truly superior to Gontran. My feelings towards her were strange and inexplicable; I hated her both for having made my husband in love with her, and for maliciously ridiculing the torments which he experienced.

Had she appeared to return Gontran's affection, I should have been fearfully miserable, still more miserable, doubtless, than I was at seeing her scornful to him—but perhaps I should have had fewer terrors for the future.

Ursula's perpetual sarcasms proved that her feelings were not touched, that she had completely subjugated M. de Lancry, and it was this fatal influence of hers that I dreaded above all.

Some time after the arrival of Mademoiselle de Maran, I was awakened very early one morning by the noise of a carriage.

After having listened without hearing it again, I fancied my ears had deceived me, and once more went off to sleep.

Blondeau, in due time entered my room; I asked if she had heard nothing.

She had heard, as I had done, the noise of a carriage, "which,

she added, "was natural enough as M. Sécherin had left the house that morning at four o'clock."

"With Ursula?" I exclaimed.

"No, madame," replied Blondeau. "M. Sécherin's servant told me that his master was setting off so early that he might reach *Saint-Chamant* to-night, where he was going upon business."

Yielding to my anxiety I sent to request Ursula to come to me, and soon afterwards she made her appearance.

"Has your husband gone without you?" I exclaimed,

"God bless my soul! with what an angry look you address me, my dear Matilda, what in the world is there so astonishing in his departure?"

"What is there so astonishing!" I repeated, perfectly confounded at so much audacity.

"Certainly, it is the simplest thing in the world. Last night when we had retired into our own room, my husband began talking to me as usual about his affairs, when, as he was looking over his memorandum book he suddenly recollected, that there was a sale of estates at *Saint-Chamant*, some of which are in our immediate neighbourhood, and which he is desirous of purchasing; he did not wish to disturb any one, so at day-break this morning he sent for post horses, and begged me to make his excuses to you. He will only be absent for a short time, and he will avail himself of this opportunity to visit that property of his which is in the neighbourhood of *Saint-Chamant*."

I became perfectly indignant. Ursula doubtless had designedly allowed this very natural opportunity of leaving Maran, to escape, she must have therefore, designs upon Gontran and my suspicions were becoming more and more verified.

I had already too long disguised my feelings towards my cousin to be able to dissemble any more, I did not feel any longer obliged to hide from her that I had witnessed her interview with Gontran, and I said—

"What can induce you to remain here, that you have not availed yourself of the departure of your husband to quit Maran?"

Ursula, faithful to her system of falsehood, did not yet throw off the mask, and answered me with an expression of sorrowful surprise.

"Why! Matilda, once again I ask you, what is the matter with you? In truth I know not what to think, you speak of my quitting Maran as if my presence were annoying to you! What can all this mean?"

"It means that eight days since, I overheard your conversation with my husband—Yes! I was in one of the closets of the alcove; I had told Gontran how much his attentions to you annoyed me, and he immediately proposed to me to ask you to leave Maran."

I could not help saying these words with a kind of triumphant pride.

Ursula slightly frowned, and smiled with bitterness.

"So then," she said, looking fixedly at me, "your husband knew that you were there during our interview?"

"He knew! Can you now understand that after having promised my husband to leave this place I am astonished you should remain here, notwithstanding the departure of M. Sécherin?"

"Well! since you were there, *entre nous*, I am overjoyed, my dear Matilda, and you must feel contented I hope?"

"Contented?"

"Yes, without doubt, you witnessed that I treated your unfaithful husband ill enough to prevent his wishing for any further recurrence of it. Did I not prove myself a faithful friend, even so far as to endeavour to change into aversion, or perhaps even hatred to me, the passion that he professed for me?"

"And you think to impose upon me by that lie?"

"A lie! were you not there? do you not remember the disdain with which I treated him? You were there! who could have told me that I had so near to me a witness of my virtuous conduct? Why, Matilda, I can hardly believe in such a happy chance—so providential—as my mother-in-law would say—" and Ursula burst into a laugh.

This time, at least, my cousin was frankly sarcastic and malicious.

"Listen to me, Ursula," said I to her "it is no longer time for raillery; the conversation that I am going to have with you will be serious, it will no doubt be the last we shall ever have together.

"I doubt that strongly," cried Ursula imperiously, "for I have to call you to an account, and your husband also, for your dishonourable proceedings towards me."

"What do you mean?"

"In hiding yourself as a spy upon an interview that I believed to be secret, you committed a breach of confidence—you made a plaything of me, you know that I may take it into my head to revenge myself."

"I prefer this haughty language, Ursula, to your soft and treacherous melancholy which duped me so long. I now know at least that I have an enemy in you—well and good—be it so."

"I have no wish to be your enemy, you have acted unjustifiably towards me, I have a right to complain of your conduct, and I tell you that I might feel inclined to avenge myself—that is all."

"But, since your arrival here, have you not done everything in your power to disturb my tranquillity?"

"What reproaches have you to make me? Can I prevent your

husband's taking a fancy to me? Can I do better than turn him into ridicule, give him not the slightest hope, and promise him to leave your house since both you and he desire it?"

"Why then did you not go this morning? could there have been a better opportunity? But I tell you to your face, had you intended to deprive my husband of all hope, instead of complacently displaying a mass of metaphysical effrontery, instead of saying to him '*I shall never love you, but I shall be able to love others passionately.*' you would simply have said 'I am attached to my duties, your wife is my friend—my more than friend—my sister—never will I be false to her or to my husband,' and such language would have been dignified and noble, instead of perfidiously designing, as that was which you employed."

"You will allow me, I hope, to be the best judge of the propriety and intention of my own words, jealousy is a bad counsellor, and I firmly believe that you are misled by that feeling."

"On the contrary that feeling enlightens me—yes, enlightens me."

"You are a too interested party in the question, Matilda, to judge it rightly, I deprived your husband of all hopes by talking to him in the manner I did. Men do not believe in our principles, but they *do* believe in our indifference."

"I do not doubt your experience on this point, Ursula, but there is one infallible method of breaking off an inclination—and that is absence."

"When it does not augment it!"

"So then it is from your feeling of indifference towards my husband that you remain here!"

"Entirely so—I have declared to him that I have almost an aversion to him, you heard me, what would you desire more?"

"Well then, admitting that my suspicions, that my fears were exaggerated; was it not your duty to put a stop to them, by not prolonging your stay here?"

"It is impossible to give any one their *congé* with more politeness; however I must allow myself to make some observations in my turn; you must feel, that, after the promise I made your husband, if I allowed M. Sécherin to depart this morning without accompanying him, it is that strong motives induced me to act in that manner."

"And is it then nothing that my tranquillity, my repose, should all be the sacrifice to those feelings that you have so wickedly trifled with."

"I am very glad to find, Matilda, that you think a great deal about yourself, you will not therefore think it extraordinary that I should bestow a little thought on *myself*, also, twice I have indirectly spoken of our departure to my husband, his astonishment

was so great that I found it would be impossible to account for this sudden change in my plans without exciting some suspicions in his mind ; he will either believe that I voluntarily fly from your husband for fear of returning his attachment, or that jealousy on your part has exacted my departure. At any rate, you perceive, his doubts will be awakened, his confidence in me will be affected, and I own to you I attach as much importance as yourself to a life of tranquillity."

" Ursula—Ursula—take care, to assign such reasons as these to me is a mere mockery."

" They are perfectly satisfactory ones in my eyes, I can assure you. It took all the authority which the language of truth possesses, to prevent my husband believing his mother's absurd visions about that Chopinelle, and I have no wish to see the renewal of such scenes as these."

" Notwithstanding all my aversion towards you," I exclaimed, " I should not have ventured to allude to your conduct in that respect, but since you can mention it so shamelessly, I will tell you that it is precisely because I know you to have been guilty of a fault completely inexcusable, that I have a right to suspect you, and to fear you, when the matter concerns such a man as M. de Lancry."

" Matilda !"

" It is because I was a witness of all that took place at Rouvray, that I feel the presentiment—nay even the certainty, that your apparent indifference for my husband, conceals some further design."

Ursula shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

" Good heavens ! I am perfectly aware that you believed the absurd calumnies of my nother-in-law," she replied, " but it is too late to rake them up again : you had an admirable opportunity of accusing me, when, in the presence of my husband and his mother, I invoked your testimony in support of my innocence."

" And dare you speak thus, Ursula ! when it was only compassion, and a generous remembrance of our friendship in days gone by that induced me to be silent. Ah ! it was with reason that she said to me—' May you never repent your defence of that guilty woman.' But do not let us enter into an angry discussion of the past. For the last time I ask you—and, if necessary, I implore you, not to prolong your stay here. Our intercourse can but be a painful one after what has taken place between us—For pity's sake go and join your husband—you say you are indifferent towards Gontran, what then is there to retain you here ? With your disposition you will be happy anywhere, I have never injured you, do not then persist in torturing my feelings."

" I would not torture your feelings for the world, but, I tell you once more, I cannot risk a rash step which would compromise my

whole future life, to satisfy a groundless fancy, a mere caprice of yours," replied Ursula with the most imperturbable coolness,

"I rather fancy you are making but a poor calculation in any event," I replied to my cousin, forcibly repressing my emotion while I spoke—"do you wish to await your husband's return?"

"I am desirous of doing so."

"Very well—whether right or wrong you must know that I am jealous of you."

"Quite without reason, quite without reason, I assure you."

"Perhaps so—but still I *am* jealous, your refusal to leave this place increases that jealousy still more; and M. Sécherin's return will not tranquillise my agitation. Even were I to conceal the cause from him, he would find it out at last. Reflect well upon this. When that hunting expedition took place it required all my self-command, and all the diversion of your husband's thoughts to prevent his detecting my secret—you see then that by refusing me when I ask you to go away, you are running into a danger still greater than that which you are alarmed at."

"How can I help it? If you choose to ruin me I shall resign myself to my fate—but I will never be mad or foolish enough to go and ruin myself."

"Perhaps—Ursula—perhaps. Take care."

"Do you threaten me? And pray what do you threaten me with?"

"I do not threaten you, but I give you notice that my happiness, my futurity, my life, are at stake, and I will struggle with all my force, I will shrink from nothing in order to preserve what you perhaps are hoping to snatch from me."

"You—capable of turning a cowardly informer? I do not believe it, I defy you to do it."

"You are right to defy me, you know that I am incapable of such an action, but, without acting that cowardly part, I can appeal to your husband's kindness, I can confess my fears to him, owning that, although those fears have not common sense, they yet make me suffer dreadfully. That will not compromise you, it may perhaps awaken the suspicions of your husband, but it will have been your own choice."

"Then I shall know how to defend—how to avenge myself."

"Listen to me attentively, Ursula, I swear to you by the memory of my mother, that if you persist in remaining here, in spite of me, I shall feel no hesitation in such an extremity, however fatal it may become. A secret presentiment tells me that one of the most vital questions of my life is at issue now. I give you notice that a great change has taken place in my disposition—it has become now as firm and resolute as it was once feeble and timorous

—do not provoke me too far, I ask you nothing but what is quite possible, quite feasible.”

“It seems to me that I only can be the best judge of that, I know my husband better than you do.”

“You purposely exaggerate his susceptibility; I have seen the influence which you possess over him—you will not make me believe that the man whose confidence was so blind as to give credit to your invention about M. Chopinelle’s letter, that the man whose faith was not even shaken by the formidable oath of his mother, you will not make me believe, I say, that the man, who lives only for *you*, and through *you*, will entertain the least suspicion when he sees you have come to rejoin him, and hears you declare that you were a prey to *ennui* while separated from him.”

“He will only see in all this a ludicrous exaggeration.”

“It would be one of those exaggerations then, which devoted and generous hearts like his, are the more likely to admit from their own capabilities of experiencing them. Your least wishes are commands to him. You will tell him, for instance, that you wish to make a tour in Italy, he will believe you and hasten to comply with your desire.”

“A thousand thanks for the good opinion which you entertain of my cleverness, adroitness, and influence,” replied Ursula with a sardonic smile. “Unfortunately I believe you have formed an exaggerated idea of my advantages. However, make yourself easy, after the return of my husband I will only stop here the time necessary to bring about our departure naturally—and till then, in *my* turn I entreat you, do not insist upon what you have suggested, and grant me your hospitality for that period.”

“This is really too infamous!” I exclaimed with indignation, “your will then is to be sufficient to ensure the misery and despair of my whole existence.”

“Do become once more reasonable, forget these insane suspicions, and then the phantoms will vanish away, and tranquillity will be restored to your heart.”

“Forget my anguish, I suppose you mean, and *then* I shall suffer no more.”

“Believe, me, nothing can be more disagreeable to me than this discussion, Matilda, and that—”

“Well then,” I exclaimed, interrupting my cousin, “if it is to be a struggle, I will accept it. You consider all means fair ones in attacking me in what I hold most dear, I then shall consider all means fair in my defence; your pretended indifference for my husband is an artifice of refined coquetry, of which I am not the dupe. You wish to please him, I will make you odious in his eyes, hitherto I have concealed from him your scandalous adventure at

Rouvray, but I shall no longer have any consideration for you, should he be tempted to forget me momentarily, for you, me, who have only given him marks of love and of devotion, at least he shall compare us two, and he shall see to what a woman he is sacrificing me."

"Matilda, Matilda, in your turn, take care," exclaimed Ursula whose eyes gleamed with rage, "take care what you say! never, to the end of my existence, would I forgive you that calumny, do you hear? do not exasperate me."

"I was sure of it!" I exclaimed, "my husband then is not an object of indifference in your eyes since you are afraid that he should hear of that adventure?"

"I value your husband's esteem, as I do the esteem of all honourable people, and it is horrible that you should wish to deprive me of it," exclaimed Ursula with an accent of outraged dignity.

"You value his esteem, and you were not afraid of blazoning forth with effrontery, the most corrupt principles! you were not afraid to turn into ridicule everything that is holy and sacred in the world! No, no, I am more than ever convinced of it; your instinctive artfulness has taught you, that incapable as you are of pleasing him by any generous and noble qualities, your only chance was to strike a blow at his imagination by some wild and strange affectation, but when he discovers that all this fabric of cynical pretensions has no other purpose than to surrender to him a heart, which *M. Chopinelle*, once, wholly possessed."

"Matilda, I repeat it, in your turn, take care! do not push me too far."

"Oh! now that I know you, I fear you no longer. It was only my illusions on your account which could be dangerous, but fortunately *they* are dissipated."

"Well then!" exclaimed my cousin, no longer concealing the evil passions with which she was agitated, "since your illusions *are* dissipated, since you know me for what I am, since you outrage me thus, I have no further need of constraint. My dissimulation towards you has long cost me enough already—you say you have unmasked me, now then look me well in the face!"

I was terrified at the expression of audacity and malice which suddenly revealed itself upon Ursula's features.

"I have worn, and suffered by wearing, that mask, years enough," she continued.

"Years enough! what do you mean, Ursula?"

"Ah! that surprises you does it? Ah! you believed me to be a devoted friend, a sister! ingenuous and confiding woman!" and she contemptuously shrugged her shoulders.

"My God! my God!"

"Do you forget then all you have made me suffer since your childhood?" she exclaimed.

"I?—I?"

"Yes, *you*, Matilda! You must think me then very insensible, very feeble, or very stupid, if you believe that I have forgotten our youth! You do not know then all the hatred, all the envy, which my ulcerated heart has amassed, since a fatal hazard threw me in your path?"

"And I—I, who had blessed that day because it gave me a sister!"

"You ought rather to have cursed it, for it gave you a victim *then*, and an enemy *afterwards*."

"A victim—an enemy—good God what have I done then?"

"Was it not in your name, was it not to your pride that I was daily sacrificed? You do not remember then that I was humiliated, insulted, despised incessantly, and at every opportunity, upon your account? No, not one single torture was spared my self love, by the comparisons which were always instituted between us. When a child, my very education was a benefit which I owed to your charity; if an elegant dress was given to me, it was another alms doled out at your expense. And this was not all—praises, flattery, and recompense, all and each were for you, while to my portion, fell reproaches, punishments, and harshness! And you believe that I—I can have forgotten this. And you believe that such wounds as those do not leave behind them scars that are ineffacable. And you believe I will suffer you now to throw a fault in my teeth, and to menace me!"

"Oh! my God, my God!" I exclaimed, holding my face in my hands, "Mademoiselle de Maran's infernal foresight did not deceive her, she knew too well in what a heart she was sowing the seeds of envy."

"And what is that to me!" exclaimed Ursula with fresh violence, "What matters it to me *whose* is the hand that has struck me, I only think of the blow which I have received. Have I not always suffered the more, because my sufferings were inflicted for *your* glorification. A childhood's punishments, a girlhood of contempt, such was my lot while with you. If the subject of our marriage was introduced, you, you were to aspire to the most brilliant matches, while I was to think myself but too happy, if I could meet with some poor and vulgar husband. *You* were so rich! *you* were so beautiful! *you* were full of such adorable qualities! while *I*, on the contrary, was poor, dull, and destitute of all the attractions which made *you* so fascinating. And well were the predictions verified. You have married a handsome and accomplished man of rank, while I have become the wife of a ridiculous vulgarian. Oh!

be assured, never, never, shall I forget what I felt, when in your presence—who, radiant with pride and happiness, were gazing upon the handsome features of your intended husband ; when in your presence, the man whose name I blushed to hear, was insulted and turned into ridicule. Oh ! *that* comparison was the last and most terrible of all the wounds which had been inflicted upon me : then, then, once more was I sacrificed and immolated to you, and to your insolent happiness, under which I have been so long trampled !”

“ This is horrible !” I exclaimed, “ you know I was a stranger to those perfidious machinations of my aunt’s. You know that even during our childhood, I would get myself punished, that I might share the severities with which you were visited, you know, that afterwards, it was not my fault that you did not marry according to your inclination.”

“ You are going to tell me that you offered me half your fortune, but did I accept it ? Who has told you that I have not my feelings of pride as you have yours ? Who has told you that I have not been still more embittered by your eternal affectation of generosity and pity ?”

“ You have always hated me then, and those assurances of friendship towards me, which you have hitherto given, were but so many falsehoods, so many blasphemies ! What ! has this odious hatred fermented in your bosom since our very childhood ? What ! have you had the power of dissembling till now ? What ! has *nothing* touched you, neither my sisterly affection or the hatred which Mademoiselle de Maran entertained towards me ? What ! with your penetration, did you not perceive that she studiously laboured to humiliate *you*, while she praised *me*, that she might excite your jealousy, your envy, and turn you into an enemy of mine at some future day ? Ah ! Ursula—Ursula—if she could but hear you, happy indeed would she be, at seeing you thus transformed into the blind instrument of *her* hatred.”

“ God bless my soul ! do not accuse Mademoiselle de Maran so much,” impatiently exclaimed Ursula, “ she doubtless only developed the sentiments of envy which already existed in me. I was born jealous and envious, as you were, sincere and generous ; had you been in my place, and I in yours, Mademoiselle de Maran, with all the calculations of her malice, would never have aroused in your breast a violent jealousy of me.”

“ But, since you acknowledge me to be sincere and generous, why do you hate me ? What have I done to you ?”

“ It is precisely *because* you are sincere and generous that I *do* hate you—I hate you moreover because I have always been humiliated on your account, I hate you because you are in the enjoyment of all the blessings which I covet. I hate you because I have had to blush in your presence. We are alone, I may say everything, there-

fore, with impunity. Well then—yes, my rage against you was carried to its highest pitch by my seeing you become acquainted with that ridiculous intrigue of mine, and by my seeing myself treated with the utmost contempt by my mother-in-law in your presence.”

“Why, you see then that the intrigue did really exist, and that you deserved the contempt which you complain of.”

“That is exactly what exasperates me, you might tell me I was as ugly and hump-backed as Mademoiselle de Maran, and I should not care a straw.”

“But—”

“But—I do not wish to make myself better than I am, I am not arguing—I do not say that I am right in entertaining the sentiments which I do, I merely say that I *do* entertain them, chance has decreed that I should be wounded in my most irritable part by you, or on your account—therefore I look upon you as my enemy and detest you accordingly. This may not be a logical conclusion, but it is true. Are you astonished at what I say? oh, I can assure you, Matilda, that suffering and isolation are singularly good masters in advancing and developing one’s intelligence. From those harsh and cruel preceptors, I first learned to dissemble and to wait. I was humiliated on your account, what could I do against you? nothing—I waited, I watched, the excessive praises with which you were overwhelmed, inspired me with the impetuous desire of compensating by art, by graceful hypocrisy, and by the most studied coquetry, those advantages in which I was deficient and which were so admired in *you*. When I was fifteen years old, I thought you beautiful—much more beautiful than myself; unable, therefore, to rival you in beauty, I determined that some day I would at least dispute your ascendancy, by an expressive play of features, and a bewitching fascination of manner—yours was a chaste and tranquil beauty, I determined to stimulate and provoke desires. But the moment had not arrived. One day I was crying with rage at the thoughts of that brilliant future which awaited you, and the melancholy fate which was reserved for me. I happened to look at myself in the glass, and I perceived that tears were as becoming to me as the gayest and wildest laugh.

I resolved therefore, for a time, to become dejected, melancholy and sentimental. *You* were rich, *I* was poor, flatteries were showered upon *your* head, *I* was crushed down to the ground with contempt—nothing then seemed more natural and interesting than the part which I selected to act, that of a resigned victim. I married and so did you, you had every advantage afforded you in your choice, and you chose a most fascinating man. The same happiness has followed you in your marriage, beautiful, rich, young, titled, with a spotless reputation, and idolized by that world that has no admiration except for your beauty, no praises except

for your virtues, you cannot form a wish that is not realized, such is your existence. Pray is not this happiness enough?" she added with an expression of rage and envy which satisfied me, that she really considered me the happiest woman in the world.

For one moment I was on the point of undeceiving her, fancying that thus at least I should disarm her—I was going to tell her all the anguish I had endured from the very first month of my marriage—the calumnies of which I had been the victim. But this seemed to me mere cowardice, and I contented myself with replying—

"You must think me very happy then, to hate me so much."

"Yes, when I compare your existence to my own, I envy you—I suffer tortures. Why should there be this difference between us? Why is there no one single advantage that you do not enjoy? no one quality, no one virtue that is not held up to admiration in you? I thought how it would be, and your aunt has incessantly dinned the same thing into my ears since she came here. At Paris, in your society, nothing is heard of, nothing is sworn by but you! You are at the same time, the most fashionable of all the women, and the most respected. You are quoted everywhere as a model of gracefulness and elegance, and not one error, not one flirtation is laid to your charge, and this too among a set of people as prone to scandalize as they are difficult to captivate—and all this while I live in the country with an obscure manufacturer, over whom I can only maintain an influence, by affecting those vulgarities, at which my tastes, and my very soul revolt. And even this is not all—you must come forsooth and pry into the shameful wounds of this existence already so cruel a one; when you arrive, I am compelled to hear from my mother-in-law and my husband a fresh edition of the praises which Mademoiselle de Maran formerly lavished upon you. Oh! you are an incomparable woman—well and good—but your insolent happiness is not perhaps altogether invulnerable."

Ursula was so thoroughly subjugated by passion and jealousy that she did not perceive my stupefaction. When I heard her talk thus of my *insolent happiness*, I understood the words of Mademoiselle de Maran, who had several times repeated to me "I faithfully observe our little treaty—I never mention all that horrid story of Lugarto to your cousin, on the contrary, I am constantly telling her that you have always been the happiest woman in the world, that everybody envies your good fortune, and that the good as well as the bad have only one feeling towards you—that of adoration."

My surprise ceased. With her usual treachery, Mademoiselle de Maran had studiously exasperated my cousin's jealousy by describing my life to be as happy as, in fact, it was a miserable one.

When I saw Ursula so infamously irritated at the happiness

which she supposed to be my portion, I reflected how intense would be her joy if she could discover the misery which I suffered in reality—and more than ever I became determined not to give her that satisfaction.

"And so," I said to her, "this is the secret of your hatred! at least you confess it. And now what are your designs? Do you wish to rob me of my husband? Is that the revenge you intend to take upon me?"

"When things are in such a state between us I should hardly think you can imagine that I shall give you any information as to my projects," imperiously replied Ursula.

"As it is easy for me to guess what those projects are," I exclaimed, "I will now tell you my irrevocable decision. I shall write to your husband to come back as speedily as possible, and when he arrives I shall confess my suspicions to him—suspicions which I will still own to him it is perfect madness on my part to entertain—and I shall implore him to take you away with him. Henceforth you are my most dangerous foe—and I have no consideration to display towards you for the future. I shall therefore conceal nothing from my husband, of what took place between you and M. Chopinelle at Rouvray."

"You will have war, then, Matilda? well, let it be war, success justifies all measures, and I hope to convince you of this."

And Ursula left me alone.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IN GONTRAN.

WHEN Ursula had left me, my first impulse was to seek my husband, and to relate my conversation with Ursula to him.

Unfortunately, Gontran had gone out at an early hour on a sporting expedition.

I desired Blondeau to inform me when he returned. At breakfast time Gontran was still absent.

I found Mademoiselle de Maran in the drawing-room. She asked me where my cousin was, and I replied—she was doubtless in her own apartment.

She was sent for, but was not there.

The morning was tolerably fine, so I concluded she was walking in the park. The breakfast bell was rung a second time, but she did not make her appearance.

Suddenly it occurred to me that she had perhaps set off to join Gontran. But I was informed that my husband had gone out on

a pony, with one of his keepers and his dogs, on a shooting excursion to a marsh some distance off.

This intelligence tranquillised me, and I sat down to breakfast with my aunt, who did not spare me various malicious remarks upon the absence of Ursula and my husband.

My thoughts were so pre-occupied, that her treacherous insinuations which, under other circumstances, would have been painful to me, were now a matter of almost perfect indifference.

On leaving the breakfast table, I returned to my own room, under the pretence of having letters to write before the post went out. I left Mademoiselle de Maran engaged with her knitting.

Two o'clock struck, and neither Ursula or Gontran had returned.

I sent for Blondeau and desired her to ask Ursula's maid, if her mistress had given her any orders.

Blondeau came back to tell me that Madame Sécherin had taken a volume out of the library, and had gone out walking.

I went all over the park but could not find Ursula.

A little gate which opened into the wood, was ajar. My cousin had evidently gone out that way. Perhaps the evening before, she had made an appointment to meet Gontran. I was terrified at this idea, for in my eyes it was a matter of great importance, not to let Ursula have the first word with my husband.

I returned to the château in a state of despair.

Mademoiselle de Maran told me that she began to be seriously uneasy about Ursula, and that I ought to send some of the servants into the wood, as she might have lost her way.

At that moment my cousin entered the room.

She came up to me with as great a cordiality as if the scene of that morning had never taken place. Her complexion was flushed, her eyes sparkled, an indescribable air of triumph and pride was visible upon her whole countenance, the dust on her delicate silk boots was a proof that her walk had been a somewhat long one, the ribbands of her scarlet-lined straw hat fluttered, unloosened, upon her shoulders, and the long ringlets of her dark hair, a little out of curl, fell down to the incipient rise of her bosom, which was only half concealed by her handkerchief *à la paysanne*.

She held in one of her hands a large nosegay of wild flowers.

She told Mademoiselle de Maran and me, that she had gone out of the park, and had almost lost her way in the wood, but, the weather being so superb, she had determined to enjoy one of the last fine days of autumn—she had amused herself with picking flowers, and had never once thought of finding her right road till she had gone at least three miles. She had fortunately met a wood cutter, had asked him her way and had been accompanied by him to the château.

This story, which she told as simply and naturally as possible,

banished the distrust which had been, and with so much justice, aroused in my bosom.

I was the more inclined to believe Ursula, because about half an hour after her return, just as the post had brought our letters, the keeper who had accompanied my husband, came with a message from Gontran, to say that he had had more sport than he expected, but that I was not to be uneasy, as he would be back to dinner.

I questioned this keeper, who told me that he had not left my husband more than an hour ago, at the piece of water called *les Sources*, where Gontran was still engaged in his sport.

This intelligence completely re-assured me.

I attached so much importance to the fact of seeing my husband before Ursula, that I once more gave directions to Blondeau to watch for his arrival, and to bring him to my room, telling him that I had most important communications to make.

When I had given these instructions, I returned to the drawing-room.

I found Mademoiselle de Maran attentively engaged in reading the letters which she had just received from Paris.

I do not know if she was conscious of my presence or not, but she did not take her eyes off the letter she was reading, and exclaimed several times with the greatest marks of astonishment.

"God bless my soul! God bless my soul! who would have believed it! why you would have given *extreme unction* to such a person as that, without confession. What will be the end of this? must he be told of it? must he be kept in the dark? it is really a terrible thing."

Losing all patience at these reiterated exclamations, and unable to suppose that my aunt had not seen me enter the room. I said to her—

"Have you heard any good news from Paris, madame?"

But she continued talking to herself, without answering me, or even appearing to have heard what I said.

"What an explosion it will make. But on the other hand, how can it be helped? At all events, *what a piece of good luck it is that I should have come here to put it all to rights!*"

These last words of my aunt's attracted my attention, and caused me some terror. I did not know what was the matter, but when I heard Mademoiselle de Maran say it was a "piece of good luck that she should have come to put" something or other "to rights," I was warned by a secret presentiment that her arrival at Maran concealed some malicious designs, and that her terrors at the Paris Revolutionists were merely a pretext.

I approached her and repeated once more, but in such a tone of voice that she could not pretend not to hear me.

"Have you heard any good news from Paris, madame?"

She made a movement, as if surprised, and replied—

"What! were you there? did you hear what I was talking about?"

"I did hear you, madame, but could not understand a word of what I heard."

"So much the better, so much the better, for it is not time. God bless my soul! God bless my soul! can it be possible," continued Mademoiselle de Maran, lifting up her hands.

You seem quite pre-occupied, madame. I will leave you," I said to her.

"I seem pre-occupied, do I? and well I may, it is enough to make me so, and you will know the reason only too soon."

"That letter then contains something which may concern me, madame?"

"Concern you? concern you? yes, more than you think for. Alas! I am quite knocked up, I feel quite no-how, at this news. But I can hardly yet believe it—no—no, you couldn't be capable of such a thing, could you?"

"Capable of what, madame? Is this some fresh uneasiness that you are trying to inflict upon me? Pray explain yourself."

"Explain myself indeed? how could I possibly do so during the absence of your husband! I must wait for him. And even then I do not know if I shall have courage. Just tell me, is his temper still as violent as it was said to be, before he married? because in that case, the thing must be broken to him very gingerly."

I looked firmly at my aunt.

"I should have indeed been much astonished, madame, if your arrival had not been marked by some unfortunate event. I am resigned to everything, and I place my confidence in my husband's heart."

"Oh! very well then, if that's the case, so much the better. I shall not have to use so many oratorical precautions. You are quite right to place confidence in your husband's heart, that will settle everything. It is a most ingenious idea of yours, positively. Nevertheless, be on your guard against his first impulse, and endeavour to have some one in the room with you, for—alas! my poor dear girl, I am very feeble, very old, and I should not be able to defend you."

"Defend me! and against whom?"

"Against your husband, to be sure—for, in spite of myself, I cannot help remembering that the Prince Ksernika has often beaten the beautiful Princess Ksernika his wife to a mummy, and for much less than this, I can tell you."

"I am pleased to see, madame, by all this exaggeration that you are only trying to play off some unfortunate joke."

"A joke? God forbid! You will see, only too soon, that

nothing can be more serious—all that I can, all that I ought to do, as your relation, is to interpose if things go too far.”

I knew my aunt too well to have any hopes of making her explain herself, or of putting an end to her mysterious discretion, I replied therefore with a coolness which annoyed her extremely.

“Excuse me, if I leave you, madame, but I must go and dress for dinner.”

“Go, go by all means, my dear girl, and make yourself as pretty as you can, that sometimes disarms the most furious—the beautiful Princess Ksernika knew what she was about, and never failed to do so. She always made a delicious *toilette*, when she wanted to keep off a conjugal storm, she always came in looking as triumphant and nice as possible, by which means her taste in dress prevented her from ever having more than one limb at a time broken by her dear and affectionate husband.”

I left the room without hearing the remainder of Mademoiselle de Maran’s odious pleasantries, and I went up stairs into my own room to wait for Gontran. On his return from shooting, he came to me, as I had requested.

I was struck with his radiant and cheerful look, as for some days I had observed him to be extremely pensive and melancholy.

He embraced me tenderly on entering the room, and said to me,

“Forgive me, a thousand times, forgive me, my dear Matilda, for having perhaps caused you some uneasiness, but, like a child, I suffered myself to be carried away by the pleasure of my sport, and I reckoned, as I invariably do, upon your indulgence.”

I was surprised at these excuses of my husband’s, for he had long ceased to make any to me.

“I am delighted,” I replied, “that you have had such good sport, you seem in better spirits than you have been for the last few days.”

“God bless my soul! nothing can be more simple, you know little causes often produce great effects. This morning when I set off upon my pony, I was in a bad humour, and I set about my sport mechanically, as it were, and without any pleasure—the sky too was wrapped in a veil of fog. Suddenly a brilliant sunbeam burst through the clouds, nature seemed to become all at once illuminated and resplendent. I know not why, but I followed nature’s example, my bad temper vanished and I became happy and cheerful in an instant—as happy and cheerful as I was at twenty, or, to speak more truly, as happy and cheerful as on that day when you said to me—‘I love you.’ Now then, look at me,” added Gontran with a charming smile, “look at me and make your comparisons, madame, if, like me, you have retained an immortal remembrance of that happy day.”



The Death of Ursula.



He spoke truly, never had I seen my husband's countenance wear a more joyous expression and one at the same time of more ineffable happiness.

"Effectively," I replied, unable to conceal my surprise, "your whole countenance is redolent of happiness, and brings back to my recollection days—oh! how blissful!"

"Oh yes," he replied with enthusiasm, "my happiness is infinite, it illuminates everything around, in spite of myself. Were my life at stake, I do not think that I *could* conceal my felicity."

"Blessings then on that sunbeam, my love, which has had the power of so changing you."

Gontran looked at me with a smile.

"Oh! I must confess everything to you, it was not only the sunbeam that changed me, but there was also, if I may say so, a *moral* sunbeam which came to chase away the gloom and darkness from my heart. Need I tell you, my own good and beloved angel, that it was your adored image which performed that miracle?"

"Really, Gontran? and how, in heaven's name, was that?"

"I asked myself why my gloomy melancholy contrasted so strongly with the brilliancy of all nature—I asked myself if I did not possess all that renders existence adorable, and if I did not owe it all to one beloved woman, the most beautiful, the best, and the most generous, of all those that ever devoted themselves to the happiness of a man. And, I said to myself, this is not all, are we not about to be united in still closer ties, by a fresh pledge of love, a new bond of affection? And yet I am gloomy! and yet I am sad! and yet I do not rapturously enjoy every instant of such an existence! Then, Matilda, it seemed to me that I was awaking from a nightmare."

"Oh! Gontran, Gontran—good God! do you mean what you say?"

"Oh yes! I *do* mean it—happiness renders one so confiding—so sincere. Once in that good path which your image had laid open before me, Matilda, I did not dread to investigate the original cause of that absurd ill-temper into which I had fallen for the last few days—and that cause was a pitiful one again. Shall I own it to you? yes, I will have the courage to do so. I was fool enough to feel profound annoyance at the sarcastic speeches of your cousin. Yes, like a school-boy, or some country bumpkin, I had a grudge against her for having laughed at my declarations—I fancied it a terrible blow, not to my *love*, that is safe in your keeping, but to my self-love. Fortunately, when I thought of Matilda, and of the little guardian angel she promises for our blissful future, I drove away those evil reflections, and I have returned to her, more repentant, and, (which is still more,) more tender, more attached, more passionate than ever."

And my husband kissed my hands with enchanting gracefulness. I thought I was dreaming.

I could not believe what I heard. What sudden revulsion in Gontran's feelings had operated such a change? His words appeared to me natural and sincere, he invoked too the image of our child with emotion so serious that I could not imagine he was deceiving me, besides, what could be his end in doing so?

This unlooked for happiness, coming as it did upon the various emotions of that day, had such an effect upon me that I let myself fall into my arm chair, as if I retained no power over myself. I put my hands to my forehead, and endeavoured to collect my ideas; then after a moment's silence I said to Gontran.

"In your turn, dearest, forgive me, if I do not make a better reply, to all your delightful kindness, but my surprise, though sweet indeed, is so profound, that I cannot find words to express my gratitude to you."

I was extremely embarrassed, I believed in the sincerity of my husband's repentance, and I did not know whether I ought to acquaint him, or not, with my interview with Ursula, her cruel avowals, and the kind of defiance she had cast in my teeth relative to Gontran.

As an attempt to sound my husband I said to him,

"By the bye, M. Sécherin went away this morning, do you know it, dearest?"

"I do. Why did not his wife go with him? it was an excellent opportunity for her to fulfil her promise," replied Gontran as naturally as possible. "She ought not to have acted thus," he added in a reproachful tone, "out of consideration to you, since I had confided to her that your peace of mind was almost dependent upon her departure."

"Perhaps," I answered, attempting to smile that I might conceal my emotion, "perhaps she repents of having been so cruel towards you, and of having repulsed your attentions, perhaps all that disdain of hers, was after all nothing but affectation."

"Oh! so much the worse for her then," gaily replied Gontran, "she has let the lucky moment go by, as people say. Now it is too late, my guardian angel is with me, and that angel is too beautiful and too kind a one not to preserve and protect me from all evil spells."

"You seem to be confident enough now, dearest." I replied with another smile, "but my cousin is very adroit, very fascinating, and your poor Matilda—"

"Oh! my *poor* Matilda," said Gontran in an accent full of tenderness, "my *poor* Matilda is a little satirical girl—Instead of putting on that humble and resigned air, she must perceive that from this moment she is my sovereign mistress. Now, between

ourselves, I believe, this same *poor* Matilda keeps up supernatural communications, with some good, invisible *genius* or other, who with a breath changes the tempest into calm, and sadness into a gentle and delicious joy—she only made one signal to him, and my soul was inundated with felicity. My *poor* Matilda, in short, puts me in mind of those fairies who conceal their power for a long time, so that they may some day reveal it in all its majesty, and I should have a fear of becoming too much her slave were it not that to obey her is to resign oneself. But I will leave you, my beautiful guardian angel, put on your best looks, your very best, so that when we look at your cousin, we may exchange a glance that will say—*poor Ursula!*"

Gontran kissed me on the forehead before he quitted me, and left me in a kind of enchantment.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE WORLD'S RUMOURS.

Now that I coolly reflect upon those words of my husband's I cannot understand how I could be credulous enough to believe in their sincerity—how this sudden and tender repentance of Gontran's, for which the motives he assigned were so strange, so fabulous, failed to awaken my suspicions.

But *then* I was ignorant that the most passionate protestations, often serve merely as a cloak to perfidiousness and treachery. And I was, moreover, so unhappy, I felt such an imperious necessity of finding at least one good feeling in my husband, that I gave myself blindly up to this un hoped for happiness. I relied besides upon my own sagacity, and my own penetration, in order to discover Ursula's true intentions.

Our dinner was a very gay one. Mademoiselle de Maran did not say one word in allusion to the indirect threats she had made. use of towards me. Ursula loaded me with attentions.

Gontran, on his part, was so marked, so affectionate, in his manner towards me, that my aunt joked him more than once upon the subject.

When dinner was over, my cousin said to me with an expression of regret.

"Ah! how happy you are—you at least can spend the autumn and part of the winter in the country."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Maran, "it seems to me, that is a happiness in which you are an equal sharer, my dear girl, would not that excellent M. Sécherin be the happiest fellow in the world

if he could see and know you were here to all eternity? And pray did he not take the trouble to bring you here himself with all the complaisance in the world?"

"Certainly, madame," replied Ursula, "but one cannot always do what one likes, and as soon as he returns here—and I have just written to him to hasten his arrival—my husband will be obliged to depart for Paris, whither, of course, I shall accompany him."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed my aunt, "this is something quite new. Before he went away he said, he could stay here till January and that you need not return to Paris till you went thither with Matilda and Gontran."

"Yes, madame, but one of his correspondents at Paris, from whom I have just heard, for I open all my husband's letters during his absence," said Ursula with a smile, "sends him word that his presence at Paris is indispensable, for the foundation of that banking house in which M. Sécherin has taken a share, as he told you; and so, my good Matilda, I have only four or five days more to spend with you, and then, when we are at Paris, we shall be in such different society—I, the wife of a modest banker—you, the brilliant Viscountess de Lancry, that we shall see one another but rarely—it will be almost a separation."

"Why I thought you were all to live together at Paris, so that might continue this model of a one and indivisible *ménage*!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran. "Are all these fine resolutions changed then?"

"They were unfortunately mere school-girl visions, and impossible to realize," replied Ursula with a smile. "And though, as far as I am concerned, I feel deep regret at having to renounce those hopes, yet I must resign myself to it."

"And then *do* confess, cousin," gaily observed my husband, "that the picture I drew for you of the only apartment, we had at your service, did not at all fascinate you."

"You are very unjust, my dear cousin, we would have satisfied ourselves perfectly with much less accommodation, for the pleasure of not quitting our dear Matilda, but the *faubourg Saint-Honoré* is so far from the business part of Paris, that my husband could not think of settling there."

Dinner was over, and I got up from table.

Gontran gave his arm to Mademoiselle de Maran and passed out before me and Ursula.

The latter, just as were about to enter the drawing-room, whispered to me,

"That is my vengeance. Are you satisfied?"

When coffee had been put on the table, Mademoiselle de Maran put on a grave and solemn look and said,

"Now that we are alone, and quite a family party, we may converse without disguise."

As she said these words she drew from her pocket the letters which she had received from Paris in the morning, casting, as she did so, a malicious and ironical glance at me.

"What do you mean, madame?" said Gontran.

"You will soon know; but you must first promise me to be calm, and not to suffer yourself to be carried away by your first impulse. But while I think of it, Ursula, just go and see if there is nobody in the dining-room."

Ursula got up, opened the door, looked into the room, and came back.

"There is no one, madame."

"May I ask what is the need of all these precautions?" said Gontran.

"Bonaparte used to say that one ought to wash one's dirty linen *en famille*. Excuse the expression in favour of the idea which is full of good sense. But before I begin," added Mademoiselle de Maran, turning towards Ursula, "I must explain to you, my dear girl, the apparent contradiction which you will remark between what I am going to say, and what I told you."

"How is that, madame?"

"I had agreed with Matilda not to mention the horrible calumnies of which she had been the victim, and the frightful sorrows which had environed the first months of her marriage. I represented your cousin to you therefore, hitherto, as the most adorably happy creature in the world. Alas! all this was not so—not at all; you will soon see it, and learn on the contrary, that, since her marriage, with the exception of a few little *quarters* of the honey-moon, the life of our poor Matilda has been but one protracted torture, and that even this is nothing to what is in store for her."

While Mademoiselle de Maran was speaking, Ursula looked at me with increasing astonishment, and if I had not been so often taken in by her hypocrisy I should have said that she gazed at me with an expression of interest.

"But, madame, once more, what is the matter?" impatiently asked Gontran.

"My poor Gontran," she replied, "you will know it but too soon—for it concerns you more than anybody else—and yet too late, for I am strongly disposed to believe that the mischief is incurable. But first you must give me your word of honour as a gentleman, not to believe, at the most, more than half of what I am going to tell you, and to make due allowance for circumstances and calumnies. After all, it was I who educated your wife, and, for my sake as well as for hers, you must not be in too great a hurry to judge her unfavourably from appearances. Come now, we

will weigh with all due sincerity the *pros* and the *cons*, and then we will come to a resolution—wont we?"

It was impossible for me to foresee what Mademoiselle de Maran was driving at.

I had so much confidence in myself that I did not feel the least uneasiness although I fully expected some malicious trick or other.

"Since I am concerned, madame," I said to her, "I ask you as a favour to cut short all those preliminaries, and to come at once to the fact."

"Come, come, this is a spirited kind of impatience which reassures me, and which augurs well. Well, then, Monsieur de Lancry, do you know what is the report prevalent among, or rather—which is much more serious—what is the conviction among those persons of our set whom the Revolution has not driven away from Paris?"

"No, madame."

"Well, then, people are persuaded—people *know for a certainty*, that before she went to her cousin at Rouvray, your wife spent a night upon the sly in a country house of M. Lugarto's, and that, that handsome Corydon—he of the "golden stars in a field of silver"—was there,—by himself, you understand—so that the whole affair might pass pretty tolerably for a nocturnal assignation."

Mademoiselle de Maran, as she said these words, looked at me with the glance of a viper.

I turned pale.

"Dear me! dear me!" she exclaimed, "do look at that poor dear girl; I declare she is already quite upset. Oh, good God! I am quite in a rage with myself for having said anything now. But then, you know, she seemed so confident in herself! Ursula, take my smelling bottle and give it to her—quick."

Ursula approached me with a look of protecting and triumphant commiseration, but I gently repulsed her, and assured her that I wanted nothing.

This first blow was a terrible one; I was not prepared for it, and I remained mute under the infliction.

My husband, who for one instant had turned crimson with rage or with surprise, soon recovered himself, burst out into a loud laugh, and exclaimed:

"What, Mademoiselle de Maran; can you—you believe such stories as this? I do not wonder at poor Matilda's stupefaction! She may well be stupefied. Who could have expected to hear such ridiculous nonsense?"

I was hastily endeavouring to find some means of clearing myself, without violating Gontran's secret, if not too late.

Mademoiselle de Maran seemed excessively astonished at the indifference with which Gontran received this announcement.

She continued :

"Wait a minute before you laugh, my fine fellow ; let me at least put the finishing touch for you to the facts of which I am informed. They say, then, that your wife passed the night in that Lugarto's house. Now, some affirm and believe that it was voluntarily and from love, which I think is rather a rash conclusion, as it would make out my dear niece a most vile character. Others, on the contrary, pretend that the poor dear girl went there with all kinds of good and virtuous intentions, in order to buy back—God knows at what price she did it—some paper or other which might have damaged your character, my dear Gontran. You will please to recollect, my dear children, that in all this, and of all this, I am neither more or less innocent, than the nymph Echo."

I could not doubt any longer, M. Lugarto had kept his word, and had written to Mademoiselle de Maran or to some of her acquaintances, several versions of that fatal night, which would have the effect either of destroying my reputation, or of dishonouring Gontran.

Falsehood and truth were so perfidiously combined and confounded in this horrible calumny, that the world from indifference or malice was sure to take everything for granted, without investigation.

I scarcely dared to look at Gontran ; and I expected a terrible explosion from him. My stupefaction equalled the disappointment of Mademoiselle de Maran.

My husband, after having once more repressed a slight emotion, replied, shrugging his shoulders with the greatest coolness :

"When such things as these are said, madame, they are no longer even calumnies—they are nonsense ; and really the times in which we live are too serious for people to amuse themselves with propagating such monstrous absurdities."

"What !" exclaimed my aunt ; "that's the way you take it, is it ? The devil take your philosophy."

"The title of philosopher would be too cheaply earned, madame, were one to obtain it because one despises groundless rumours which have not even the consistency of a calumny. Matilda should not be uneasy at such fooleries. In a few words I will recall to your recollection the melancholy circumstances owing to which M. Lugarto's name became unfortunately liable to be coupled with that of Madame de Lanery. That man made a cowardly abuse of the intimacy which he had almost forced upon me, that he might attempt to injure the reputation of my wife. I answered that cowardly conduct as it deserved, by giving him the lie and a couple of blows in the face before twenty people. A duel took place, and M. Lugarto received a sword-wound from me ; the next day I set

off for England, whither I was called by important business. Immediately after my departure Matilda left Paris, to pay a visit to her cousin till my return ; I rejoined her on my return from London, and accompanied her here. That, madame, is the whole truth. As to the ridiculous inventions which people trouble themselves to write about to you, and to which you think it your duty to call our attention, I repeat it, they are not worth even giving the lie to, and I should not waste another thought upon them, had not Matilda been childish enough to feel saddened by them for an instant. But she is excusable ; she has just made her entrance into the world, and her pure and ingenuous soul is naturally liable to be impressed by such miserable slanders—slanders which hereafter would not have served even to excite disgust.” Then addressing himself to me, Gontran added with an accent of tender affection, “ Forgive me, my poor Matilda—my unfortunate connection with Lugarto causes you this fresh annoyance, but I hope it will be the last.”

I was deeply touched at Gontran's simple and dignified language.

From the beginning of this conversation, my cousin had seemed absorbed in reflection, and the expression of her countenance had completely changed.

Mademoiselle de Maran, in spite of her assurance, was completely disconcerted ; she looked attentively at me, at Ursula, and at my husband, endeavouring to discover the cause of Gontran's indifference, or moderation :—a moderation which surprised as much as it touched me, for my husband might with justice have felt offended at some of Mademoiselle de Maran's assertions.

After this silent aberration, which lasted for a few seconds, my aunt continued with an air of reflection ;

“ Come, Gontran, you do not allow yourself to be thrown off your guard—that, at least is something—you know very well, that all I ask is, to be able not to believe a single word of what they write to me, and to give it the lie, plainly and plumply ; but, on the other hand, as the proverb says, “ there is no smoke without a fire.” Well, then, let us consider between ourselves, who can have ignited this train of scandalous reports ? How can one suppose that grave, serious people—for my correspondents are grave and serious people, would amuse themselves with inventing a cock and bull story of Matilda's nocturnal visit to M. Lugarto, if there was no foundation for the tale. In fact, after all my good fellow, you must know more about it than any body. Firstly, had this Lugarto ever any thing in his possession by which you might have been dishonoured ? Secondly, is he capable, in such a case, of parting with this said instrument of your destruction, solely for the pleasure of performing a generous action ? For myself, such conduct would seem to be decidedly pro-

blematic, hypothetical, not to say grotesque, on the part of that sort of creature whose breed is always perverse and malicious."

Mademoiselle de Maran's infernal malice, served her purpose perhaps, without her knowing it.

It was impossible to touch more cruelly, upon the quick, the suspicions which Gontran must entertain, as to the cause which actuated the restitution of the forged instrument—a restitution which M. Lugarto seemed to have made voluntarily.

Although my husband could not enter upon this question with me, since he believed me to be completely ignorant of his fatal action, I had nevertheless remarked, that he guessed at some mysterious cause of M. Lugarto's restitution.

It was impossible for me to tell yet, whether Mademoiselle de Maran was acquainted with the whole affair ; nevertheless, I expected, this time, a movement of anger from Gontran.

I was almost frightened, when I saw him listen to Mademoiselle de Maran, with the same indifferent calmness—he shrugged his shoulders, looked at me with a smile, and replied.

"Why this is no longer a calumny or a stupidity, we are getting quite into the romantic, and the supernatural. Is this all, madame ? Do not your correspondents communicate any further intelligence ? It would be a pity to stop when once upon such a good road."

"No, certainly, it is not all !" exclaimed my aunt, unable any longer to restrain her rage. "I have told you of what the most respectable people were convinced—now I must tell you what will be the effects of their convictions—and those effects will be deucedly agreeable to you, I promise you. Though you may gabble away about the romantic, and the supernatural ; you and your wife, wherever you go, will surely find yourselves in the unpleasant predicament of being pointed at everywhere, and of being cut dead by nine out of ten of your acquaintance. That surprises you, does it ? You will say, perhaps, that there must be some magic in it ! and yet nothing can be more simple. I will just explain it to you, according to my poor judgment at least—it will either be believed that your wife has sacrificed her own honour to preserve yours, my good fellow, and then you will be reckoned a scoundrel—or it will be believed that your wife yielded to her inclination for Lugarto, and then she will be reckoned an abandoned creature, not to mention, that in such a case, you will be considered the most despicable fellow in the world, it being as plain as a pikestaff, that you winked at that inclination, either because you owed money to that horrid man, or because your wife having brought you all her fortune, you find it now more politic and economical, to keep your eyes shut."

"Indeed, madame, all this will be believed, will it ?" said Gontran.

"Certainly, that is what the good and inoffensive sort of people—your friends, in short,—will believe."

"And our enemies, madame?"

"Ah, ah, ah! your enemies, that is quite another thing; they will believe that you and Matilda are one as deep in the mud as the other in the mire, and that you understand one another perfectly. If there only was one to blame in the *ménage*—they would say—whether it were the husband or the wife, there would have been a split between them. A virtuous wife would not remain with a dishonoured husband; she may sacrifice her own honour to save her husband's; but that sacrifice once accomplished, she will leave him; for were she to remain with him, she would become his accomplice. On the other hand, a man of honour would not remain with a wife who had outraged him—if he has no fortune he will live in privation rather than allow it to be suspected that a shameful feeling of self-interest keeps him under the same roof with an adulterous wife.—What then will be the conclusion which your enemies—those murderous and viperous wretches—will come to; when they see you two on such excellent terms together? Why, they will conclude that you have all kinds of abominable tolerations, one for the other."

"At last—at last—I see through it all!" I exclaimed, interrupting Mademoiselle de Maran, "your hatred has carried you too far, madame, you have betrayed your secret, in spite of yourself.—Blessed be God who thus unfolds before our eyes, the enmities which pursue us!"

"Hey day! the girl is mad," said Mademoiselle de Maran.

"Gontran—Gontran—I kept asking myself, why that woman, who yet is my father's sister, should have come here.—She now tells you the reason herself. Yes, madame, now I understand everything—you wish, by your calumnies, to excite some fearful discussions between myself and Gontran, and so to disunite us—effectively, madame, that would have been a brilliant triumph for you—for we have scarcely been married a year! and a separation would have been eternal ruin, either to me, or to Gontran, for that separation would have confirmed the most odious reports."

A frown of Mademoiselle de Maran's convinced me that I had, struck home.

She began, as usual, to laugh loudly, in order to conceal her rage.

"Ha! ha! ha! how amusing the dear girl is, with her little suppositions. Why, are you mad? do I speak to you in my own name? I come, you will be pleased to remember, in my character of a good and high principled relation, to tell you this. 'My dear children, take care; this is what people believe; it is not a vain rumour, a mere report, a piece of gossip, but it is the conviction of serious people, and people of consideration, whose words are law. Now that the world puts its interpretation upon your conduct, since it is impossible to make people believe any thing else—since you are dishonoured, if not one *and* the other—at least one *or* the

other, I come in my character of a good and high-principled relation to——”

Gontran, interrupted Mademoiselle de Maran, by saying to her——

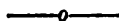
“It seems to me, madame, that the world might light upon a much more simple, and much more natural method of accounting for the obstinacy of that attachment which continues to exist between me and Madame de Lancry; it would be to believe that we live an honourable life together; that, having no mutual reproaches to exchange, we feel a profound contempt for so many atrocious calumnies; and that we have too much good sense to place our happiness at the mercy of the first scoundrel who chooses to malign us. This account of the matter would have the merit of being the only possible and true one, which is of no little consequence, I should imagine. To resume madame, I do not share in the susceptibility and distrustful feelings of Matilda. The poor girl has already suffered so much from the machinations of the wicked, that, blinded by her resentment, she may, for an instant, have confounded you with them. I doubt not, that she is mistaken; in speaking to us, as you do, you yield to the feelings of interest, with which we inspire you; pray, put then the finishing stroke to your good offices, and counsel us what we ought to do, in order to convince our friends that they are the dupes of calumny, and to prove to our enemies that they are scoundrels!”

“My good nephew,” said Mademoiselle de Maran, with rage, “I counsel no longer, the time is gone by for that; but I guess, and I foretel. Listen to me then, if you are curious to know the present and the future. In your pretty little *ménage*, one of you is a dupe and a victim, the other a knave and a brute; a rupture will become inevitable between you, and that sooner than you expect, because the victim will end by shaking off the yoke. But that rupture, my dear children, will come too late; the world will have grown accustomed to see in you, two accomplices, and will continue to despise you. That very separation, which might, at least, have saved the reputation of one of you, will only be a fresh accusation against you; you will be looked upon as a rascally pair, even too rascally to be able to live together any longer. You think all this funny enough, don't you? You fancy I am raving mad, eh? Well then, you will come some day, and tell me if I was wrong. One word more, and we will drop the subject. This abominable revolution has so scared my friends, that I scarcely saw any body, and hardly knew anything about all this business. Nevertheless, having heard a vague rumour or two on the subject, I begged your uncle M. de Versac, and M. de Blancourt, two old friends of mine, to be upon the watch, to make enquiries, and to write me word what they heard, saw, or what they knew had been said. There are their letters, read them; you will see that I have invented nothing. Now let us not say

another word on the subject ; we will have a rubber if you like. If Matilda is too tired, I, you, and Ursula, will play dummy. All has ended admirably : you, my good nephew, are contented and resigned, so much the better ; I am delighted, in raptures ; I am becoming quite frisky in my joy. For after all, what is it I want ?—your happiness. Well, then, the more you are both despised, the happier you are ; and this gives me a capital chance of exerting myself for your felicity—doesn't it ? Now then, ring the bell, and ask for the cards."

I went up stairs into my own room, leaving Ursula, my husband, and Mademoiselle de Maran, to their game at whist.

That employment allowed them at least to be silent, after so painful a scene.



## CHAPTER VI.

### HAPPINESS AND HOPE.

I WAS extremely perplexed ; I knew not whether Gontran's calmness was real or affected, and once more, in spite of M. de Montagne's advice, I was on the point of telling my husband everything about that fatal night.

But I reflected that it was perhaps, in a great measure, the wish not to awaken my suspicions with regard to that unfortunate forgery which had rendered Gontran apparently so indifferent to the attacks of Mademoiselle de Maran. Knowing as I did my aunt's infernal malice I could not conceal from myself that we had much to fear from the enmity of the world.

The freezing coldness with which Gontran had been received some months previously seemed almost to warrant the prophecies of Mademoiselle de Maran ; I was uneasy to know whether Gontran would come to my room before he retired to his own apartment ; I wanted to tell him how happy I felt at Ursula's approaching departure.

I attributed this resolution of my cousin's less to any sentiment of generosity than to the dread of seeing me acquaint her husband with my suspicions as I had threatened to do, and thus awakening his distrust for the future. In this I perceived the soundness of Madame de Richeville's advice.

About eleven o'clock Gontran knocked at the door and entered my room.

It was almost with anxiety that I cast an interrogating glance at his features, so much did I fear remarking a menacing expression upon them.

There was nothing of the sort ; on the contrary, the expression of his countenance was more tender, more affectionate than ever.

" Oh ! dearest," I exclaimed, " how malicious is Mademoiselle de Maran. Fancy her coming here with the odious purpose of causing perhaps a violent rupture between us, by reporting to us the most frightful calumnies !"

" Without positively believing, as you do, that this was the purpose of your aunt's visit, I am inclined to think she was getting a little bored at having no one to torment, and that knowing pretty nearly beforehand the contents of my uncle's and M. de Blancourt's letters, she came to cast this torch of discord between us. You were right, Matilda ; Mademoiselle de Maran is more malicious than I supposed, henceforth there will exist no motive for our seeing her."

" Oh ! dearest, how kind you are !—if you knew how delighted I am at this promise of yours ! I have always had a presentiment that all our unhappiness would arise from Mademoiselle de Maran."

" Fortunately, in the present instance, in her desire to injure us, she has done us a service almost without knowing it."

" How is that ?"

" I have read my uncle's and M. de Blancourt's letters, it is evident that the most false and most odious rumours are circulated respecting us : malice has taken advantage of some very simple circumstances, and odiously disfigured them : thus, because I went to England to fetch some papers which might have compromised a third person, it was said that Lugarto had in his possession documents sufficient to dishonour me. Neither will I enquire farther into what can have given rise to the absurd fable of your having passed a night in Lugarto's house, for I know the horror you had of him :—but indeed I must be mad to dwell for a single moment upon such infamies. This malicious act of Mademoiselle de Maran's may be serviceable to us in this respect, that it informs us at least of what our enemies are saying. This revelation should especially make some alterations in our plans ; for instance I should think it advisable—that is, of course, if you agree to it—to defer for some considerable time our return to Paris ; for instance, to let a year or fifteen months elapse first, and to remain here till then : the recent political events will afford an excellent excuse for our absence. I know Paris and its circles well, in six months people will no longer trouble their heads about us, and in a year these miserable calumnies will be forgotten. If, on the contrary, we appear in Paris, in a few weeks, as we had intended, we should tumble into the midst of that universal reprobation which would surprise you less if you knew the world better—You are beautiful, virtuous—You love me, you selected me for your husband, there is enough

and more than enough to excite a general hatred, and a general jealousy which will not fail to make their profit of any mystery which may exist in my past connection with Lugarto. If I were alone, I should despise these vain rumours, but I am responsible for your happiness, and I should be the veriest wretch alive, were I not to act in such a way as to spare you fresh sufferings, you—who have already suffered so much for me. The wisest, the most prudent course then is to postpone indefinitely our return to Paris. Tell me, Matilda, do you agree with me? I entreat you answer me."

"Good God! how *can* I answer you?" I exclaimed with an indescribable burst of gladness, "how can I answer you when my heart beats, as if it would break, with surprise and happiness. My God! my God! you are determined then to drive me mad to-day, Gontran? Tell me! Oh! no, this is too much felicity to crowd into one day. To recover your affection, to have the certainty of remaining alone here with you, and that for a long time, instead of going to Paris—once more, Gontran, it is too much. I did not ask so much, oh! my God!"

And I could not help giving way to tears, though they were, this time, tears of pleasure.

"Poor girl," replied Gontran. "Alas! your surprise is a cruel reproach, and one which I too much deserve—it is true then, I have rendered you so unaccustomed to happiness that you weep tears of unexpected rapture, when you hear me say 'I love you, and that we shall remain here for a long time.' Oh! by heavens, that is horrible—when I think that for a moment I misjudged you! my poor beloved angel! How could I then, instead of enjoying the exquisite delicacy of *your* soul, the adorable goodness of *your* heart, how could I allow my heart to become torpid, while I was giving myself up to I know not what gross, stupid and brutal existence? Is it a dream? is it a reality? tell me, tell me, my guardian angel. Oh! yes tell me, dearest, that we fell asleep at Chantilly, and that we have now awoken at Maran—"

"Oh! speak thus, speak thus again with your own voice, your own sweet and enchanting voice." I replied to my husband, clasping my hands together in a sort of ecstasy. "Oh! speak thus again, you know not how much good those kind and tender words do me, what a salutary balm they diffuse over me—Oh! Gontran—I fancy that our child trembled gently while you spoke—yes, yes, joy and sorrow, that poor little being henceforth will share all and every feeling—On my knees then my dearest love, I thank you for it, and for myself, I thank you for the happiness you bestow upon us—"

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The days which followed this conversation with Gontran, were one continued enchantment to me, it was impossible to be more tender, more attentive, more considerate, than my husband.

Mademoiselle de Maran perceiving that her malicious projects had almost completely miscarried, did not conceal her disappointment, and talked of soon going away, pretending, to feel more reassured by the last intelligence from Paris. Ursula expected her husband every day.

In accordance with her promise to me, she had written to him, requesting that she might accompany him to Paris instead of remaining at Maran, as had been originally agreed between them.

From the day when she had heard Mademoiselle de Maran speak of the calumnies which we had to bear, I remarked a singular change in my cousin's manner towards myself and Gontran.

To my husband she was more than ever sarcastic, ironical, and contemptuous; towards me, on those rare occasions when we were alone together, she was constrained and confused, she sometimes looked at me with an expression of interest which I could not understand, often I perceived she was on the point of speaking to me with the fullest un-reserve, as if she had some secret to confide to me, and then she suddenly checked herself. Besides I avoided as much as possible these *tête-à-têtes*.

My mornings were spent with Gontran.

After breakfast we took long drives, during which but little was said, then came dinner, and the evening was taken up with Mademoiselle de Maran's rubber. Now that I am enlightened by the past, I can remember many circumstances which *then* I scarcely remarked, because I could not take in their whole signification.

Thus, although my husband invariably displayed towards me the most perfect tenderness from the day when he had so suddenly and so delightfully changed, he still seemed a prey to profound reveries and pre-occupation.

Sometimes he was most unaccountably absent in his manner, at others, I fancied he was under the impression of some extraordinary and almost painful *astonishment*, as if he were seeking, but in vain, to solve some cruel and strange enigma.

His wild bursts of gaiety, which had at first so much surprised me, disappeared. I even observed that his features were frequently darkened, by an expression of bitter gloom.

When I let him perceive how surprised I was at this, he gently replied,

"I am thinking of the sorrows which I have inflicted upon you."

Although these symptoms should have appeared singular to me, they yet gave me no uneasiness. Gontran was full of attentions and kindness towards me, he was constantly alluding to the neces-

sity of our remaining at Maran, for at least a year longer, no less for the sake of an economy which the future we had to look to rendered imperative, than for the purpose of allowing time sufficient for calumny to evaporate.

I could not then, I repeat, feel any uneasiness at Gontran's singular pre-occupations, and I should have been afraid of irritating him by any questions on the subject.

Mademoiselle de Maran, (warned doubtless by that instinct which taught her to like those who were enemies to me,) seemed to have conceived a most tender attachment for Ursula, and my aunt, and cousin, sometimes took long walks together.

Mademoiselle de Maran had evidently believed at first, that Gontran was paying attention to Ursula ; I was convinced of this, by her perfidious jokes about M. Sécherin ; but the marks of interest which Gontran displayed towards me, and Ursula's coldness towards him, seemed to defeat her suspicions.

Ursula generally walked in the park every morning, and Gontran had chosen that time of the day, to sing with me as in former times.

In short, except the annoyance of having two persons in the house, who I knew were my enemies, I had never been more completely happy, since the days of Chantilly.

Even this constraint was about to cease, and I should soon find myself alone with Gontran and our mutual love.

The last letter which Ursula had received from M. Sécherin, to whom she wrote regularly every day, announced his arrival for the thirteenth of December.

I shall never forget that date.

The day had arrived.

Although M. Sécherin was generally extremely punctual in answering his wife's letters, Ursula had not heard from him for three days.

She was not at all uneasy at his silence ; on the contrary she perceived in it a fresh proof of her husband's approaching arrival, as he would of course have written to inform her, if any change had taken place in his plans. I was just going to sit down to the piano with Gontran.

Blondeau came to ask me if I could see Ursula. My husband prevented the refusal I was about to utter, by saying to me.

"She is going away to day ; it is merely an act of formal politeness ; let her come, and I will return presently."

Although this interview could not but be extremely disagreeable to me, I did not hesitate to follow my husband's advice.

Ursula entered the room.

We were left alone.

## CHAPTER VII.

## STANCE.

she began, "I did not think  
 once more, and speaking to  
 arrives this morning ; another  
 , so that a last explanation would

what purpose ? It would be useless."  
 you are concerned, perhaps," replied Ursula,  
 to reproach yourself with, towards me, while I  
 ashamed to confess it—have grievously erred towards

looked at Ursula with distrust, expecting from her some  
 vision, not of feeling, but hypocrisy.

But I had been her dupe so often, that I no longer feared to be  
 weak and confiding as I had been.

Nevertheless, one thing surprised me ; my cousin no longer  
 affected the melancholy and plaintive accent which she ordinarily  
 employed as one of her most irresistible seductions ; her manner on  
 the present occasion, was cold and calm.

"You have, indeed, erred towards me," I replied, "but, at the  
 moment when we are about to part, I should not have put you in  
 mind of it ; all intercourse—all friendship, is broken off between  
 us ; henceforth we shall remain as strangers to one another. Per-  
 haps, some day, I shall forget the harm you have done me."

"Do not misinterpret my motives in asking for this last inter-  
 view," answered Ursula ; "I am not come to ask you to forget my  
 confession of the envy with which you always inspired me, and the  
 instincts of aversion which had been the result of it."

"Then why ask for this interview ?"

"Listen to me, Matilda ; you have already seen me under differ-  
 ent aspects : on one day a despairing, mournful, and, as you say, an  
 unappreciated woman—on another, a haughty, ironical, and insolent  
 coquette, complacently giving utterance to the most cynical theories ;  
 to day degrading myself so far as to flatter the vulgar tastes of my  
 husband, and rendering him, after all, as happy as he has the power  
 or desire to be—to morrow, deceiving him without remorse, and  
 employing the most perfidious hypocrisy to alienate him from his  
 mother, who detested me. Well then, these aspects, already so

various, of my character, are nothing, compared to the mysteries of my heart ; for I unite in myself many contrasts, Matilda. For instance, I have an immoderate thirst for luxury, splendour, and elegance : this passion for display, is carried in me to such a point, that I confess it to my shame, I would have married the most disgusting old man, to satisfy it. Well, then, I have, nevertheless, the courageous patience to go and bury myself in the country, in a life of wretchedness and vulgarity, to give my husband time to increase his fortune, so that he may put it in my power, to lead, in Paris, that luxurious existence, which has always been the object of my dreams, and to attain which, I should have been capable of sacrificing every thing. I love to govern imperiously ; and yet, there are some despotic, almost brutal dominators, whom I could submit to and adore. I am, from nature and calculation, false and deceitful ; and sometimes I have fits of frankness that partake of insanity. In a word, I am capable of much evil, and sometimes of much good : Oh ! do not smile with that incredulous and contemptuous expression, Matilda. Yes, of much good—at this very moment, I can give you a proof of it ; doubtless, this good has a taint of evil—what human feeling has not ? But, nevertheless, I believe that the good preponderates : you shall be the judge. A week ago we had a long conversation, in which I confessed to you, the jealousy with which you had always inspired me. Yes, I envied you unutterably ; young, beautiful, rich, witty—bestowing an irresistible gracefulness upon virtue and dignity ; fascinating, in short, by those qualities which ordinarily command only respect—but which do not attract ; I saw nothing in the world more perfect than you.”

“ These flatteries — ”

“ Oh ! they are not flatteries, Matilda. I have witnessed your powers of fascination—I have seen you, in order to please a poor old provincial lady, employ more charming seductions than would turn the heads of twenty men of fashion ; for you possess one inestimable quality—the coquettishness of virtue, as so many other women possess the coquettishness of vice. In short, you united in yourself then, as you do now, all the advantages in which I am deficient ; only a week ago, Matilda, I envied those advantages ; because I believed you were indebted to them for an insolent happiness—but to day — ”

“ Well then !—to day ?”—I said, seeing Ursula's hesitation,—

“ Today, I know that you are miserable—yes, I know that you are the most miserable of women, and I have no longer the courage to envy you those rare and brilliant qualities. This is another of my contrasts which you must explain, as you are best able.”

“ Your habitual penetration has failed for once,” I replied to Ursula, “ for precisely during the last week, since I have seemed to you so worthy of compassion, I have never been more happy ; ” and

I added proudly, "Never has my husband shown himself more attentive, and more tender towards me."

"We will talk presently about this attention and tenderness," replied Ursula, with a singular look; "let us first speak of the cause which has changed my hatred and my jealousy into pity; if you would allow me, I would say into interest—Mademoiselle de Maran, I know not for what purpose, but doubtless, with the intention of exciting my envy still further, delighted in exaggerating all your happiness to me, still more, till the day when, in my presence, she told you the calumnies of which you are the victim. While I made due allowance for her maliciousness, I still remained convinced of one thing, that you are the most virtuous, the most noble-minded woman in existence; and that, yet, your reputation is, if not lost, at least, seriously, and for ever compromised."

"You are mistaken—truth always forces her way to the light at last—"

"Alas! Matilda, do not deceive yourself! the false and the true are unhappily so moulded in the events which have produced the unjust judgments of the world, that it will be very difficult to combat them. Where there is any doubt, society does not give to the accused the advantage of that doubt, but condemns at once, so that I repeat it again, I now behold myself too cruelly avenged for the advantages which I envied you."

I was indignant at the kind of commiseration which Ursula affected; her praises revolted me, and although what she had said about my reputation, was, alas! too likely to be true, I still would not admit it in her presence. "I conceive," I said to my cousin, "that *you* must have the greatest need of believing in this singular distribution of human justice, which would brand all virtuous women with disgrace! But do not be in too great haste to triumph; in spite of your hopes to the contrary; every one, sooner or later, is judged according to his, or her deserts.—Spare yourself then the trouble of pitying me; and as to my *qualities*, you invent for them such an end, and such a recompense, that your praises are but so many sarcasms."

Ursula continued with unalterable coolness.

"Believe me, it is precisely because these qualities *are* so ill recompensed, that I praise them so unreservedly. As for envying you for them, I am very far from that—I should not know what to do with them," she added with that peculiar smile of hers, "I have not seen more of the world than you have," she continued, "but by reflection, I know it better than you will ever know it, whatever you may say. I am convinced then, that your reputation is mortally injured, in spite of your radiant virtue."

"Madame—"

"Do not consider that I repeat this for the purpose of insulting you. Matilda—no,—no. Now," continued Ursula, after a minute's

silence, "you believe me to be the most false, the most deceitful of women; so, instead of being touched at what I am going to say to you, you will doubtless be still more irritated, and will treat me as a hypocrite: never mind; at this moment I am speaking for myself, and not for you.—Well then, now that I know the frightful sorrows which you have already experienced, now that I know those which are awaiting you—well, then! it is true,—oh! it *is* true, Matilda, I have repented, bitterly repented of the evil which I once wished to do you—I dare not say the evil which I *have done* you."

As she pronounced these last words, my cousin's voice trembled with emotion. Had it not been for my distrust, I should have believed in her remorse, but I knew Ursula to be so false, and such an accomplished actress, that I smiled bitterly, and put back her hand which was seeking to take mine.

"You do not believe me, Matilda?"

"No, and you are doubtless about to summon tears to your aid, in order the better to convince me."

"Tears? no, Matilda, no, this time I will not weep, for my sorrow is so profound, so sincere that false tears will be unnecessary to make you believe in it."

Stupefied at the cynical audacity of this avowal, I looked at my cousin with astonishment.

And—yes, yes I will confess it, idiot, fool, as I may be deemed—after so many vanished illusions, so many deceptions, I was moved and touched, in spite of myself at the expression of Ursula's countenance, and the indescribable gentleness of her glance.

I was the more struck by that expression, because it was so utterly dissimilar to my cousin's habitual affectations. I believed then, and I still believe that she was under the influence of genuine feeling.

Nevertheless I determined to resist, with all my power, that species of fascination.

"Oh! you are the most dangerous of women!" I exclaimed, "leave me, leave me. If your regrets are real, they are fruitless, and they extenuate in nothing, the fearful injuries which you have inflicted upon me. You wished to destroy my happiness—I was not the dupe of your artful coquetry towards my husband, and had he not felt for you that cont—"

The word seemed too harsh a one, and I tried to keep it back.

Ursula finished it, however.

"That contempt, you were going to say, Matilda, were you not? say on—say on—I can, I ought to hear anything from you now."

"Well then, it was no fault of yours that you did not seduce my husband, that you did not inflict the last blow upon a woman

who had never wished anything but your good, and whom you already think so unhappy—so unjustly unhappy! supposing the interest you display to be sincere.”

“Yes, it is true,” replied Ursula. “Yes, in that conversation, at which you assisted without my knowing it, I was perfectly aware, that instead of extinguishing your husband’s passion, I was only stimulating it still more, as well by my affected indifference, as by my raillery and contempt. I call it *passion*, Matilda, because it really was passion—do you hear? and because it *is* passion still.”

“Do you dare to assert that is passion now---now?”

“Do not think I wish to wound your self-love in the slightest degree, I wish to do you a service, Matilda, and to repair, in part, the mischief I have inflicted upon you—thank God it is still time.”

Ursula spoke with an accent of such authority, that in spite of myself I listened to her in silence.

“Yes, she continued, “I knew how to stimulate your husband’s passions. This calculating conduct of mine, ought to re-assure you as to my feelings towards him, but not as to his feelings then, and *now*, towards me.”

“Oh! this is scandalous,” I exclaimed, “what a frightful calumny. This is your farewell, then? you wish to leave, as you depart, a dreadful suspicion in my breast!”

“Matilda, in pity to yourself, permit me to finish; my husband may come at any moment, and render a continuance of this conversation impossible.”

“In pity to myself?”

“Yes, yes, in pity to yourself, unhappy woman. Listen to me, believe me I am yielding to a movement of generosity which some day perhaps will console me for many a bad action---Listen to me then, if not for your own sake, at least for the sake of your unborn child!”

“What! you know!” I exclaimed with stupefaction, for I had confided that secret to no ear but Gontran’s.

“Yes---yes—I know it,” replied Ursula, “and that reason above all, by increasing my remorse, has determined me to act as I am doing.”

After some hesitation, Ursula continued with downcast eyes, and a trembling voice.

“You remember, do you not, that angry conversation which passed between us?”

“Yes---yes---well, what of it?” I exclaimed with anguish, for my heart was seized with an odious presentiment of evil, when I thought that my husband had told this woman the secret which none knew but he and myself.

"I will not recriminate," she went on with increasing emotion, "but still, if in that conversation I brutally owned to you, Matilda, the envy with which you always inspired me, you at least were merciless to me, you reproached me with a disgraceful intrigue which I will never confess—you reproached me with my treachery, and *then* too I believed you to be the happiest woman in the world—*then*, I swear to you, I knew not what you had suffered, for remember, Matilda, it was only on the evening of that very day, that I heard through Mademoiselle de Maran, a part of your sorrows."

"In heaven's name—speak—speak. Well, after that conversation, what happened? But—yes—I remember, you went out walking in the wood."

"Forgive, forgive me, Matilda. I went there to meet your husband, who had made an appointment with me to come to him at a keeper's house that was uninhabited."

This confession was so unexpected, so horrible, that at first I could not believe it.

My last hope was at stake.

If I believed this, I must believe that Gontran's conduct to me for the last week had been one tissue of falsehood and hypocrisy.

If I believed this, I must believe that the tenderness which he displayed to me, was a mere appearance put on to conceal his intelligence with Ursula.

I could not, I would not admit this odious reality. Losing all command of myself, I exclaimed,

"You are calumniating Gontran, he was out shooting all that day, he sent one of his servants to tell me so."

"That man merely said what his master had ordered him to say."

"Was it not true then? was that man a liar?"

"Yes, yes, pardon me, Matilda. Maddened by the hatred I felt towards you, and wishing to avenge myself upon you, by robbing you of your husband—I became guilty."

"I tell you I do not believe you—I tell you, you are calumniating yourself that you may inflict a deadly wound upon *me*."

"I have the courage to tell you the truth, Matilda, disgraceful as that truth is to myself, and painful as it may be to you."

"Good God! good God! you hear her?" I exclaimed, lifting up my clasped hands.

"Pardon, Matilda, for when I heard afterwards how miserable you had been, when I knew by Gontran that you were a mother, poor, unhappy woman, that you were a mother! oh! *that—that* more than anything disarmed me. I shuddered at my guilt, when I reflected that I had yielded, not even to love, but to a mean feeling of hatred, to an execrable inspiration of revenge."

"My God! my God!" I exclaimed in a fit of inexpressible de-

spair, "take away my senses—my senses or my life! I cannot—I will not suffer any more."

"Matilda, Matilda, pardon, I swear to you I did not then suspect all the claims you possessed to the tenderest interest and compassion. And then I must have courage to tell you everything. Well then, I did not at that time suspect your husband's odious indifference towards you; no, I did not believe that the love which he felt for me, could render him so false, so unjust, so cruel, as he must necessarily have been, as far as you are concerned, for, alas! you do not know the projects he has formed."

"Oh! this is frightful," I exclaimed, "she has been half way to meet dishonour, and she comes to me to accuse my husband! What can this woman be? What can *he* himself be? What am I? What is all this existence? Is it a dream? Is it a horrible reality? And you—you who are there before me, who gaze at me, whatever you are, answer—where am I? What is the truth? What is the falsehood? Has then the tenderness which Gontran has lavished upon me, for the last week, been merely a snare, an insulting hypocrisy? But what object could there exist for such deceit? since you were about to depart—since you *are* about to depart. Oh! it is a chaos in which my brain is losing itself—I am delirious, my God! I am delirious! have mercy upon me, enlighten me, Ursula! see, am I humiliated enough? am I miserable enough? Look, I am at your feet, Ursula, at your feet."

"For God's sake get up, Matilda. Now it is I—I who am asking your forgiveness."

"I forgive you, I forgive you—but at least tell me the truth, the whole truth, frightful as it may be. I am a mother, I no longer belong to myself; to suffer like this would be to kill my child! I tell you I will suffer no longer, I will not; if Gontran has so shamefully deceived me, all hope of bringing him back to me is for ever lost. Well then, I will bear that, I will see him no more, I will stay here alone, and when my child is born I may be happy again. So, Ursula, fear not, tell me all, do you hear? all—all—your frankness may save my life. Speak, Ursula, speak, for the love of God let me have a certainty, however frightful that certainty may be, death is better than agony."

"Poor woman, poor, miserable woman," said Ursula, covering her weeping eyes with her hands.

"Yes, miserable, very miserable, am I not? Well then, you cannot envy me now, can you? it would be barbarous to persecute me any longer. You see, it is impossible to be more miserable—that is what you wanted. Is your hatred sufficiently satiated?"

"Ah! Matilda, I am too well avenged. It is horrible, horrible. Unhappily I have no power over the past, but I have over the

future. Listen to me attentively. Here is a letter which I have received from Gontran, here is the answer I was about to return. I have been longing every day to give him this letter, which does not extenuate my errors, but proves at least that I hoped to repair them. In this answer I displayed myself in such odious colours, that notwithstanding my regret at having outraged you, I have hitherto hesitated to put into Gontran's hands these letters which are so disgraceful to me---here they are."

And Ursula gave me a sealed envelope, which I took mechanically.

"And now one word more, Matilda, I might have withheld this cruel avowal, have set off for Paris, and have left you completely in the dark, but, when you read your husband's letter, you will see what were his plans for the future; you will see that he feels a mad passion for me; the consequences of which have made me shudder. I have hitherto told you of the evil which I have done you, now, this is how I hope partly to repair it; you will confound your husband by the letter which he wrote to me, and he can but throw himself at your feet to implore your pardon. With this letter which is my answer to his, you will prove to him there is not the slightest hope of his ever seeing me again. Moreover you can avenge yourself for the past, and secure the future. Were I to occasion you the shadow of a jealous feeling, send to M. Sécherin the letter I have addressed to Gontran: if you wish to avenge yourself for the past, Matilda, put that letter instantly into my husband's hands, it will leave him no doubt as to the extent of my guilt: I know him well---blindly confiding as he is now, not one atom of compassion would he shew me, if he once becomes convinced that I had deceived him, he will drive me from his house, my father will never see me again, I shall be left without resources, and from that dream of opulence which I am now about to realize, I shall fall headlong into destitution---and you do not know, Matilda, what destitution might bring me to do! And besides," added Ursula with almost a solemn expression of voice, "there must be something fatal, something providential in what has happened---*I never write*---I am too adroit to do anything which might compromise me, the fault which I have committed, might have remained, if not hidden, at least unproved; and yet I have written this letter which may prove my destruction, and yet I come voluntarily and entrust it to you---nothing forces me, you see, to place myself thus at your mercy; nothing, if it is not my repentance for the past, my good resolution for the future, and my blind confidence in your justice; nothing, in short, forces me to act thus, nothing, unless it be one of those strange, inexplicable contrasts in my nature, of which I talked to you,

Matilda, and which you derided."

I remained completely bewildered, and holding the envelope in my hand.

Such cynical corruption, with which, perhaps, mingled a kind of generous magnanimity, was to me incomprehensible.

I asked myself, and I ask myself still, if the confession which Ursula had just made, was a calculation of infernal treachery, or dictated by a tardy feeling of interest in me.

Did she pretend to place herself at my mercy, that she might fill my cup of despair to the brim, by revealing to me the unfaithfulness of my husband? or did she sincerely wish to put into my hands, securities for the future against herself and against Gontran?

I looked at my cousin with mingled feelings of terror, astonishment, and distrust.

Suddenly there was a noise of horses in the court-yard.

My room was on the ground-floor; Ursula ran to the window, put aside one of the curtains, looked into the yard, and then said to me, with a touching simplicity which struck me in spite of myself—

"Matilda, there is my husband's carriage; you can tell him everything, and avenge yourself for the evil I have inflicted upon you."

We were silent for a few moments.

My door opened.

Ursula started back with stupefaction.

It was not her husband, but his mother, Madame Sécherin who entered.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CHASTISEMENT.

MADAME SÉCHERIN doubtless derived a superhuman strength from the circumstances in which she was placed.

Till then, I had always seen her walk with difficulty, and bent down by old age and infirmities, now she advanced into the middle of the room with a firm, deliberate, almost an agile step. The wrinkles seemed to have vanished from her brow, and to have given place to a radiant kind of menacing satisfaction, and overwhelming triumph, which lent a majestic and terrible expression to her countenance.

You would have said that she was commissioned to execute some decree of Divine vengeance, and that she had for a moment elevated herself to the height of that formidable mission.

In her proud and haughty attitude, her savage smile, and her bitter glance, one guessed that the mother outraged in her idolatry for her son, the mother sacrificed to a guilty wife, was come with a cruel joy to accomplish a fearful revenge.

At the sight of that pale woman in her long black garments, I felt such a thrill of terror, that I forgot all which had just taken place between myself and Ursula.

Like my cousin, I remained mute and fascinated in the presence of her mother-in-law.

The latter exclaimed, with a stifled voice, and looking up to Heaven—

"My God! my God! do not forsake me; give me, I implore thee, the strength to accomplish Thy will to the end! There may be too great a joy, as there is too great a sorrow!"

And for an instant, Madame Sécherin leant her wrinkled hand upon the back of an arm-chair, as if she were yielding to some violent emotion, and then exclaimed, looking at Ursula as if she would pierce her through and through.

"I told you so wretch! I told you God would strip the wicked of their masks, and crush them, sooner or later—"

Then, turning towards me, she added—

"I told you so; I told you that some day you would be punished by this woman, for the culpable pity with which she inspired you. I told you so! I told you that my son would come back to me, and that then I should be his only consolation!"

And she folded her arms, shaking her head with an expression of savage pride.

Gontran now made his appearance, followed by Mademoiselle de Maran, and by a man who was a stranger to me.

"May I ask, madame, what has procured us the honour of your visit, and who this gentleman is, who has requested one of my servants to conduct him to me, and who has been sent by you to fetch me?" said M. de Lancry.

"That gentleman is my son's head clerk; I could not travel alone, and my son desired him to accompany me." Then addressing the stranger, she added, "Firmin, we shall leave this place in an hour; go out of the room and shut the door."

Gontran looked at me with surprise.

The clerk left the room.

My husband, Mademoiselle de Maran, Madame Sécherin, Ursula, and myself, remained together.

Gontran and my aunt knew nothing about the commencement of this interview; but nevertheless they had a presentiment that some event of grave importance was at the bottom of all this.

Madame Sécherin said to my aunt—

"You are one of the family, madame?"

Mademoiselle de Maran looked at Ursula's mother-in-law from head to foot without replying, and then glanced at me, as much as to ask who that person was.

"Madame Sécherin," I said to her, and added, introducing my aunt to Ursula's mother-in-law, "Mademoiselle de Maran."

Madame Sécherin, remembering the high terms in which her son always spoke of Mademoiselle de Maran—completely in the dark as he was with respect to my aunt's real character—approached and said to her—

"You, too, are on our side, madame—you are on the side of the good against the wicked. My son has often told me, you are like me, simple, upright, and an enemy to all hypocrisy; your presence here is useful; there cannot be too many judges, for there is no lack of culprits."

"Although I don't the least know, what you are talking about, my dear madam, with your judges and your culprits," replied my aunt, "I will certainly not lose so good an opportunity of assuring you that your son is the nicest fellow in the world, not to mention that all he has told you about me and my primitive simplicity, speaks whole volumes for his penetration and discernment. I shall on the other hand, venture to hope that what he has told us about you, is equally correct, and we should then only have to congratulate one another singularly upon this mutual and fortunate meeting."

Madame Sécherin looked attentively at Mademoiselle de Maran, and whether from habitual observation, or maternal instinct, or that my aunt's sarcastic smile had betrayed her irony, Ursula's mother-in-law, after a moment's silence, replied to my aunt, shaking her head, and the fore finger of her right hand, as she did so.

"No—no; I see—you are not, you never will be, on our side. you look wicked; my son was deceived in you, as he has been deceived in others."

Mademoiselle de Maran burst into a loud laugh, and exclaimed—

"Upon my word, dear madame, you put me in mind of some Sybil or Pythoness, with your wonderful, and by no means flattering prophecies, only, allow me to observe, neither more or less than if I had the honour of talking to that delightful son of your's, these prophecies of your's are somewhat uncivil ones, since from your account I shall never be included in the category of good people."

"I do not know what a Sybil may be, madame, but I *do* know when I am turned into ridicule," said Madame Sécherin, haughtily.

"I shall have the greatest pleasure possible in reminding you, my dear madam, that the Sybil of Cumæ was a kind of fortune-teller—who prophesied about the future, with the devil's own

grimaces, and muttering all the time the most outlandish gibberish in the world."

My husband, alarmed at Ursula's paleness, upon whom he had kept his eyes constantly fixed, exclaimed, addressing himself to Madame Sécherin—

"May I ask, madame, once more what has procured me the honour of your visit? Madame de Lancry seems much disturbed; your daughter-in-law also appears a prey to strong emotion. You sent to request my immediate presence; what is going on? what is it? Pray explain yourself."

"Oh! you shall know it sir, you shall know it," replied Madame Sécherin.

I was on the rack; I had a presentiment that this woman possessed some overwhelming proof of Ursula's guilt, but she was in no hurry to produce it. She seemed to find a sweetness in protracting her revenge, and to enjoy the horrible anxiety in which she kept my cousin.

The latter, in spite of her habitual self possession and audacity, seemed completely overcome.

She felt that all her fascinations would be powerless to convince her mother-in-law.

I confess that, notwithstanding all the motives I had to detest Ursula, I could not repress a feeling of compassion for her, when I reflected that her destruction was imminent at the very moment when the remorse she experienced for her fault, had perhaps just inspired her with a generous sentiment.

Madame Sécherin slowly drew from her pocket an envelope, exactly similar to that one which my cousin had just put into my hands.

I the more easily remarked this, because both envelopes had evidently formed part of the writing materials which had been placed in Ursula's apartment, and that the paper was of a blueish colour.

It will be seen presently why I dwell upon this particular circumstance.

"Do you know this letter?" said Madame Sécherin in a loud voice, and shewing the envelope to Ursula. She then added with an expression of austere dignity, and pointing to heaven with the forefinger of her right hand. "See, if the finger of God is not in this! The proof of your first fault was a letter which you audaciously robbed me of. The proof of your second crime is again a letter, but this time you yourself sent it to my son—the Lord had sent you absence of mind, as an instrument of his vengeance."

Ursula did not answer a word, but turned pale as death, she then rushed to me, seized the envelope which she had given me and which I still was holding in my hand, broke the seal, opened it,

cast a rapid glance at the contents, and then let it fall upon the ground, while her head sank upon her breast with an expression of mournful despair.

The wretched woman, victim of a fatal error, had made a mistake in the direction of the letters.

Thus she had sent Gontran's letter and her own answer to her husband, while to me she had delivered the letter which she had written for M. Sécherin.

"Do I not tell you that the finger of God is in this?" continued Madame Sécherin. "Do I not tell you that the Lord has decreed, that you, you who are so crafty and adroit, should be unmasked and destroyed by a mistake! You put one name upon an envelope instead of another—And that is all! And that one trifling mistake has taught my poor son at last, what you really are—he sees now that at Rouvray I was truly inspired by the Lord when I said—'I swear that this woman is guilty. Drive her from the house although the proofs of her infamy are not forthcoming!' And then I was looked upon as mad, was I not, for exacting from my son, without sufficient cause, what he called an insane sacrifice? but God has taken care to justify me, and to prove that the instincts of a mother are infallible."

Effectively there was indeed such a strange fatality in this revelation, that we were all stupefied for a moment.

Mademoiselle de Maran was the first to break the silence, and said in a harsh voice to Ursula's mother-in-law.

"In God's name, all whose little secrets you seem to know so well, my dear madame, enlighten us as to all this fine imbroglio of envelopes, spare us your moral reflections, and just tell us what all this proves."

"An old age that is impious, wicked, and immoral, is sure to set bad examples," replied Madame Sécherin, looking fixedly at Mademoiselle de Maran, and she added severely. "Now that I know you have brought up these two young women, I am no longer surprised at that wretch's perversity," she pointed to Ursula, "but I *am* surprised at her cousin's virtues," pointing to me.

"What's all this, what's all this?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Maran, "it's no reason, my good woman, because you are, in all probability, the confidential servant of Providence, that you should shew so little mercy to the rest of the world. I should like to know what you would say, if I took it into my head to reproach you with having brought up that worthy son of yours in such a delightful way, that he has got no more than he deserves? What would you think of that, eh? though I don't make you responsible for his little conjugal mishaps, do I?"

"For heaven's sake, madame, let us put an end to this discus-

grimaces, and muttering all the time the most outlandish gibberish in the world."

My husband, alarmed at Ursula's paleness, upon whom he had kept his eyes constantly fixed, exclaimed, addressing himself to Madame Sécherin—

"May I ask, madame, once more what has procured me the honour of your visit? Madame de Lancry seems much disturbed; your daughter-in-law also appears a prey to strong emotion. You sent to request my immediate presence; what is going on? what is it? Pray explain yourself."

"Oh! you shall know it sir, you shall know it," replied Madame Sécherin.

I was on the rack; I had a presentiment that this woman possessed some overwhelming proof of Ursula's guilt, but she was in no hurry to produce it. She seemed to find a sweetness in protracting her revenge, and to enjoy the horrible anxiety in which she kept my cousin.

The latter, in spite of her habitual self-possession and audacity, seemed completely overcome.

She felt that all her fascinations would be powerless to convince her mother-in-law.

I confess that, notwithstanding all the motives I had to detect Ursula, I could not repress a feeling of compassion for her, when I reflected that her destruction was imminent at the very moment when the remorse she experienced for her fault, had perhaps just inspired her with a generous sentiment.

Madame Sécherin slowly drew from her pocket an envelope, exactly similar to that one which my cousin had just put into my hands.

I the more easily remarked this, because both envelopes had evidently formed part of the writing materials which had been placed in Ursula's apartment, and that the paper was of a bluish colour.

It will be seen presently why I dwell upon this particular circumstance.

"Do you know this letter?" said Madame Sécherin in a loud voice, and shewing the envelope to Ursula. She then added with an expression of austere dignity, and pointing to heaven with the forefinger of her right hand. "See, if the finger of God is not in this! The proof of your first fault was a letter which you audaciously robbed me of. The proof of your second crime is again a letter, but this time you yourself sent it to my son—the Lord had sent you absence of mind, as an instrument of his vengeance."

Ursula did not answer a word, but turned pale as death, she then rushed to me, seized the envelope which I had just given me and which I still was holding in my hand, but she did not open it,

cast a rapid glance at the contents, and then let it fall upon the ground, while her head sank upon her breast with an expression of mournful despair.

The wretched woman, victim of a fatal error, had made a mistake in the direction of the letters.

Thus she had sent Gontran's letter and her own answer to her husband, while to me she had delivered the letter which she had written for M. Sécherin.

"Do I not tell you that the finger of God is in this?" continued Madame Sécherin. "Do I not tell you that the Lord has decreed, that you, you who are so crafty and adroit, should be unmasked and destroyed by a mistake! You put one name upon an envelope instead of another—And that is all! And that one trifling mistake has taught my poor son at last, what you really are—~~he was~~ now that at Rouvray I was truly inspired by the Lord when I said—'I swear that this woman is guilty. Drive her from the house although the proofs of her infamy are not forthcoming.' And then I was looked upon as mad, was I not, for exacting from my son, without sufficient cause, what he called an insane sacrifice! but God has taken care to justify me, and to prove that the instincts of a mother are infallible."

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"but I am surprised at her extreme wickedness," pointing to me.

"What's all this, what's all this?" exclaimed Madame Sécherin to Maran, "it's no reason, my good woman, because you are a probability, the confidential servant of Providence that you are! I shew so little mercy to the rest of the world, I must not be so kind to you with having brought up that wretch out of your own mouth, a delightful way, that he has got so many more than he deserves! Would you think of that, if I thought I had been your daughter for his little conjugal misdeeds?"

"For heaven's sake, Madame, do not go on like this."

sion," said Gontran to Madame Sécherin. "It is incredible that I cannot ascertain what you wish."

"I wish, sir, to make your wife read this letter which you wrote to my son's wife—"

And she gave me a letter.

"I wish, sir, to make you read the answer which that woman intended to send you, for God is just! and that creature must be as much detested by the man who was her accomplice in guilt, as by him whom she has scandalously outraged."

And she put a letter into Gontran's hands.

"I wish, sir, to read to that adulteress the letter which my poor son has written to her."

And then Madame Sécherin, as unmoved as ever, folded her arms, and gazed at us in silence.

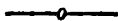
My husband was thunderstruck, he at last understood the horror of Ursula's position, and especially in what despair *I* must be plunged by this unlooked for discovery.

Ursula, who was completely overwhelmed, seemed to see and hear nothing.

The scene had now assumed a character of such grave importance, that Mademoiselle de Maran forgot her malicious irony for a moment, and appeared seriously attentive.

For my part I experienced a kind of feverish excitement, which would lend me for a few moments longer a factitious strength, but I felt that I could not hold out long, and that I should perhaps lose all sensation before the fatal mystery was cleared up.

While Ursula was lost in her reflections, while Gontran was reading Ursula's answer to his letter, that answer which the wretched woman thought she had given to me, I perused the letter of my husband which had called forth my cousin's answer.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### M. DE LANCEY TO URSULA.

"No, no, Ursula—I cannot obey your commands—your conduct is so inexplicable—my sensations are so strange, after the unhopèd for happiness with which you have overwhelmed me, that I must write to you since I cannot speak to you; since, out of prudence, doubtless, you seem to shun the few opportunities I could have of seeing you alone before your departure. I know not whether I am awake or dreaming—Perhaps you will help me in unravelling this mystery.

"The possession of a woman whom one ardently loves, always makes one happy and exulting! and yet the day after that day,

on the most blessed one of my existence,  
 scholy, which is still more increased by  
 et. Strange indeed, I repeat it, Ursula,  
 range that it terrifies me—the hidden  
 ments my soul, gives me a pre-  
 sent of my existence is about

—fatal—because it is with-  
 as unchangeable—fatal—because  
 ore than you love me! you are the  
 ed me! near you, I confess it, I feel  
 eriority. You once said you would have  
 Well then, you *have* a slave—a blind,

ued slave.  
 amed to tell you this, and yet I do tell it you,  
 ope that this humble self-depreciation will disarm that  
 rony, which pursued me, I believe, even in the midst of  
 intoxicating bliss, which hitherto, alas! has had no morrow!  
 es, I fancied even then, that I was yours, and that *you* were  
 not *mine*. There was no love, no voluptuousness, no remorse in  
 your glances. There was an indescribable expression of triumphant  
 hatred, of insolent tyranny, of cruel sarcasm. Oh! Ursula, if  
 I believed in the Evil one, if I believed in those *bargains for*  
*souls*, which the fiend, we are told, so often makes, I should at-  
 tribute to him when he sees some wretch fall into his power for  
 all eternity, a prey to his infernal fascinations, that haughty and  
 contemptuous glance of yours.

"This seems to you a foolish, an absurd comparison, perhaps  
 you will laugh at it—pitiless in your own raillery, you will think  
 perchance that I am jesting, and yet this comparison is a serious and  
 a true one. It explains, as far as explanation is possible, a sen-  
 sation that is real, and yet that is indescribable in its reality,  
 Yes, from that day, Ursula, my soul is no longer my own. Angel  
 or fiend, it belongs to you! What will you do with it?

"Folly, hallucination, and yet I fancy that my heart beats no  
 longer in my own breast, but that it beats in your—yes, in  
*your* heart! With terror do I now discover that hitherto I had  
 never loved. Do not take this as an idle compliment, Ursula,  
 if I wished to address you with common-place flatteries, I should  
 not adopt this bitter and gloomy language; which with all its fan-  
 tastic tediousness can teach you nothing but what you already  
 know, for you are convinced of your omnipotence over me.

"No—no; I tell you that till now I have never loved; I have  
 always believed, and I believe still, that when a man experiences  
 the one true passion of his existence, he is almost sure to feel  
 impressions analogous to those of women, in their utmost delicacy,

their utmost timidity, their utmost submission and, their utmost distrust ! Well, that is what I feel in your presence, Ursula, that is what I had never felt before. A school boy would be ashamed of such a confession ; it is giving you an immense advantage over me—but why should I struggle ? what have I gained already by struggling against my passion, since that day when you revealed yourself to me in so new a character, during that long conversation, to which my wife was an unseen listener ? Why did my fancy for you suddenly put on all the characteristics of the most inordinate passion from that day—that day too in which you ridiculed me so mercilessly ?

“ Why was it not your qualities which fascinated me, but the audacity, the temerity of your principles, the sparkling irony of your wit, the burning eloquence with which you so voluptuously described the disorder into which the senses are thrown by the approach of the man who is beloved ?

“ Ursula, I have a horrible thought, but I must tell you everything ; do you know why possession has left me so unhappy, so uneasy, so sorrowful ? Why it does not give me over you that ascendancy, that empire which it always gives ? why, in short, I repeat it again, *I am yours*, while *you are not mine* ? It is, I shudder at believing, at writing it—it is because I fancy that *you—you* yielded neither to the transport of passion, or to the intoxication of the senses. One would say you had yielded, not to me, but to some mysterious influence to which I am a stranger.

“ Oh ! you will never know the fearful regrets, the burning desires, the bright and insane hopes which you have left me, you know not what it is to say to oneself—I have possessed, yet without possessing—that woman who excites the most impetuous desires—I have every right over her, and yet I have none ; one day she gave herself up to me with so much carelessness and contempt, that I only feel humiliation and bitterness from the remembrance. What was I then ? what was I in your eyes ? Have you made a plaything of me ? If you do not love, why confer your favours upon me ? did you think then to convince me I was so insignificant in your sight, that you could with impunity grant me everything one day, and forget it the next, without even thinking it requisite to blush ? No, no, never did Roman empress in the full insolence of her contempt, more audaciously prove, that a *slave* was not a *man*.

“ Since that day I have vainly endeavoured to read upon your countenance one tender recollection—is it then dissimulation, insensibility, calculation, prudence ? your features say nothing—nothing but sarcastic haughtiness or indifference. Why do you treat me in this way ? Am I not your lover ? Am I so no longer ? Did you in your infernal and unheard of coquetry with-





CHAPTER IV

The discovery of the secret door

hold nothing from my possession—that you might make me regret everything more bitterly and furiously afterwards?

“By heavens, this must not be. I have no faith in myself, but I have faith in my despairing passion. Those transporting emotions of which you speak in words of such fire—yon *shall* feel them for *me*, do you hear, Ursula? I will arouse in you all the impetuosity of my own passion. Oh! how beautiful you will be then. The very hope, the very idea of that moment makes my blood boil, and my head whirl round. Ursula! Ursula! to be loved by you, I will hesitate at nothing—devotion—sacrifices—disgrace—I would add, if I dared, crime!

“And then to think that while the voluptuous fascinations of your beauty, excite passion to frenzy, the brilliant audacity of your wit no less eternally enchants, subjugates and enslaves.

“If you loved me—oh! if you loved me, could there exist a more enchanting mistress in the Universe? It is enough to drive one mad, when one thinks that, thanks to love, you so indomitable, so sarcastic, so independent, *you* would become submissive, tender and devoted, with that adorable grace which belongs to you alone, and not after the fashion of other women, who make one look, if not with hatred, at least with contempt or indifference, upon tenderness, devotion, and submission, because it is in their weak and inferior natures to possess those negative qualities.

“After all, what matters it to me, that the lamb should be gentle and timid? What merit has it in being so? But if the panther creeps to my feet, trembling and caressing, then—oh! *then* I feel a joy—a pride—a triumph unrivalled—

“Ursula! Ursula! I repeat it, I feel it here—by the impetuous pulsations of my heart, you shall love me as I wish to be loved by you—oh! I will force you to do so. Yes, a despairing passion, succeeds at last by dint of devotion, in establishing its dominion, and it shall establish its dominion even over you—do not look upon this as blind and ridiculous presumption—the very intensity of my passion gives me this assurance.

“And yet sometimes I hope, I fancy that your affected indifference is a mask destined to complete my wife’s illusion, and to make her believe still more blindly, in the return of affection which I am feigning towards her. But no—you would have whispered something in my ear; we should have arranged some signs of intelligence between us; while since that day—that cruel yet delicious day, you have studiously avoided the rare opportunities I might have found of conversing with you alone. Who knows even if I shall succeed in putting this letter into your hands!

“Strange, incomprehensible woman! If I hint at our love by some well-turned allusion, you reply to me by a sarcasm. Stranger still, my wife dreads and detests you; you know it, and yet since

the day you wronged her, you seem to look upon her with a touching interest! Is it remorse? No; you will never know remorse; and alas! what would that remorse be for? Is such an error an error at all? And besides, would not one say that your sole end now is to make me regret and adore Matilda?

"Seeing your inexplicable indifference, I have pretended to display the tenderest attentions towards Matilda, as much to divert my wife's suspicions, as in the hope of arousing some jealousy in you. Instead of this alarming or piquing you, you have seemed perfectly contented that it should be so, and have betrayed no envy. Ursula, it is enough to drive one mad. Who are you then? What are your designs upon me? Are you my good or my evil genius? Sometimes you terrify me; I fancy that you are destined to exercise the most fatal influence over my existence. No—no; forgive me, I am raving. Ursula, do not be offended at this letter; you are one of those superior women to whom one can say everything.

"This confusion of ideas will convince you of all the extravagance of my poor brain; my thoughts are clashing and conflicting; a thousand phantoms offer themselves to my imagination, because my mind and my heart are in a state of uncertainty, because I do not know what you are to me. This existence of doubt is horrible; if it continues, if you do not reassure me, I shall hardly have strength and energy left to feign that tenderness which I must feign in order to divert Matilda's suspicions, and prevent an explosion which might be your destruction. Fortunately the most incessant absence of mind into which I am plunged by so many contending thoughts, passes in my wife's eyes for an amorous reverie of which she is the subject. A few days, and all will be cleared up.

"You do not know, Ursula, you are not aware of the invincible obstinacy of my disposition; I knew it not myself till I had experienced the force of energy with which you have inspired me. I will only renounce the hope of being loved by you, when I have tried everything which mortal can try. And yet—no; I cannot even admit the thought that I shall ever renounce that hope. No; a secret voice tells me that I shall succeed.

"These are my projects; do not attempt to combat them; you cannot alter them in anything. In a few days you set off for Paris; under pretence of the calumnies which Mademoiselle de Maran has brought to our ears, I have persuaded my wife to spend the winter at Maran; a fortnight after you are gone I shall join you at Paris; business will afford a sufficient pretext for my departure in Matilda's eyes. Once at Paris, I shall find plenty of excuses for prolonging my stay there; *my wife's situation* will prevent her coming to join me; besides, even if she wished to do

so, it would be in vain. Never did I feel more intractable, more pitiless ; I could be cruel to everything except to my passion for you. It requires all my fear of seeing Matilda, led away by her jealousy, ruin you in your husband's eyes, to force me into feigning that which I no longer experience towards her.

" Here is another remark, Ursula, which comes to confirm what I said to you just now, that sincere and profound love inspires a delicacy unknown before. Hitherto I had always uttered falsehoods in the course of my intrigues, without a shadow of pain or regret, but *now*, I swear to you, my very soul revolts at uttering to my wife the expressions of a tenderness which I no longer feel. I fancy they are so many blasphemies against the sincerity of my passion for yourself.

" It requires all Matilda's blindness not to discover my hatred and disgust for the part which I am acting towards her. But there will soon be an end to it ; I shall join you at Pais, and our relationship will permit me to see you every day, without arousing the suspicions of your husband. Then, Ursula, when there will be no further constraint upon my actions, I shall be able to make myself loved—and you must love me. Exact what sacrifices you will from me, possible or impossible ones, I will submit with delight ; *no* sacrifice will be too great ; I shall regret nothing, because *now*, everything which is not you, is to me as if it existed not. This is a fearful thing to say, but it is the truth ; my reason, my will cannot prevent it. Thee, thee, Ursula, nothing but thee—always thee. Oh ! tell me, will you break the feeble chains which fetter us both ; will you go with me to hide our love in some distant land ? Do not let pity restrain you, Ursula ! Whether my passion be a happy or a miserable one, my wife's lot cannot change ; did she unite in herself even more qualities and more perfections, I feel all attachment for her is for ever extinguished in my heart.

" You are now the ideal, the dream, of my heart, of my soul, of my senses, of my life. Judge then if Matilda can contend against your influence, if you love me, or console me if you love me not.

" Once more, Ursula, *you—you* unconditionally—I admit no doubt on that point ; I will not admit any, because I will not look at the bottomless abyss which would open before me if—but no—no ; you *do* love me, you *must* love me ; chance has not delivered up my soul to you in vain. I exist no longer except for you ; *you have been mine* ! whatever you say or do, we must hereafter and for ever, each belong to the other. I shall recoil from no expedient—do you hear ? *from no expedient*, to effect this. It shall be so, because fatality wills it to be so. Adieu ! whether angel or fiend, I shall share your heaven, or—your hell !

G."

\* \* \* \* \*

I will relate hereafter the abrupt and profound reaction which took place in my feelings, during the perusal of this letter.

While I was reading it, Gontran, on his side, was reading the answer which Ursula had written for him, and which she believed she had given me at the close of my interview with her.

—o—

## CHAPTER IX.

### URSULA TO GONTRAN.

"At least I am a pattern of generosity—I send you back your letter, which has amused me very much. It contains a mixture of diffidence and conceit, of blindness and discernment, of tenderness and cruelty, which it is highly diverting to observe. All this is perfectly destitute of grandeur, fascination, or even of talent, (although you certainly *have* talent), but as it is all quite natural, and I will go so far as to say, even horrible, in its simplicity—you have convinced me.

"I believe then in your passion; yes, I believe that you love, for the first time in your life. I believe you will do everything in the world to make yourself loved by me. I believe you to be capable of the most insane attempts, of the most atrocious actions, to attain this fine result; I believe you in short to be susceptible of genuine devotion towards me; so that really, my poor cousin, nobody would recognise you for yourself.

"Without pretending to deserve the diabolical qualities, which, in your astonished pride, you compliment me upon possessing—as if, forsooth, it were necessary to have recourse to the black art, before one could be worthy or capable of fascinating you—I believe that I possess great influence over you, and that influence will be fatal to you if you choose—it depends upon yourself.

"I believe, moreover, like you, that it is my bad qualities which have so irresistibly turned your head.

"In the first place, you have not given me the slightest desire of acquiring any virtues in which I may be deficient, or of displaying any if I possess them; those virgin gems are buried in the bottom of the soul like pearls at the bottom of the sea; they are treasures which never fall to the lot of those who stop at the surface of the waves, of which they are the sport. There are solitary and

mysterious depths into which the short sighted or the feeble will never penetrate.

"We agree therefore perfectly upon general points, my dear cousin, only we shall always differ upon the most important point of all; you firmly believe that, by dint of love *you will compel me to love you*, and as I firmly assure you *I never will love you*, and that *by dint of love* you will end by making me detest you; the love one inspires being generally in an inverse ratio to the love one feels. Surely a Don Juan like you ought to know at least the A B C of your trade.

"If your passion did not render you as stupid as a school-boy, you would see the profound truth of one passage in your letter, which passage, however, was only a burst of your wounded pride.

*'Never did Roman Empress more audaciously prove that a slave was not a man!'*

"I have underlined these words, for they deserve it; this time at least you have made a right guess, in other words it signifies that *revenge is not love!* Well, then, do you understand the enigma? Can you guess now the motives of my strange conduct? No? not yet? Come, come, you are decidedly not in one of your bright days. I will begin my story from a somewhat early period; my only hope is that this confession may make you hate me most terribly. It is unfortunately too late for me now to appear *respectable* in your eyes, by such an appearance I should have been certain of quenching your mad passion.

"Know, then, that in coming to Maran, and even in thinking of availing myself of Matilda's former offer to let myself and my husband have apartments in your house, my fixed determination was to make you fall over head and ears in love with me; do you hear? over head and ears in love—and to avail myself of your insane passion, I will tell you presently for what purpose.

"I possessed everything that was requisite to fascinate you; in the first place I was not in love with you; I felt myself to be far superior to you, and moreover I was persuaded that the surest method of captivating a man who had become *blasé'd* by numerous triumphs, was to laugh at him; keenly irritate his vanity by this means, and to convince him, by way of finishing the business, that while one was perfectly indifferent to *his* merits, one might not be so to another's.

"All this fine system put into practice with tolerable cleverness, succeeded with you to the degree which I expected.

"At Rouvray, on the very morning of your arrival at my house, you made a somewhat hasty and tolerably impertinent declaration of love to me,—I replied to it in the way most in accordance with my own designs.

"Here, you renewed your protestations, I replied and proved to

you, that I did not care a straw for you—in a pure spirit of contradiction you became still more ardent, which was no more than natural. For a few days I added fuel to your flame, not by tenderly returning it, but by turning it into ridicule, by displaying myself under the strangest aspects to your eyes, and by affecting principles so cynical, and opinions so audacious that any high-minded man would have been disgusted.

“I could scarcely myself believe the progress I made in your heart by such miserable methods. Had I entertained a high opinion of you such an easy success would have destroyed it.

“Remember this too, my good Don Juan, women of my disposition generally feel love the more from the difficulty they have in inspiring it. They disdain an easy victory, they are pleased with a struggle, charmed by obstacles, and become passionately enamoured of what is impossible.

“In a word, profit by my advice, if ever you find another woman of my sort, the only way to seduce her will be to display a cold indifference towards her.

“We are too much alike in many respects, my dear cousin, (I hope I say this with all due humility) for you to make any impression upon me, it is in our nature to be *attracted by contraries*. While you keep in that *normal road*—as the learned M. Biscan used to say—you are successful. Look for instance at Matilda—perhaps she adores you because she is as pure as you are perverted. When, on the contrary, you address your homage to me, who am perhaps as far advanced as yourself in theory, you mistake your destiny, you lose your advantages, and I laugh at you.

“The augurs in old times could not look at one another without laughing, and for a similar reason your serious love causes me inconceivable merriment. Beware, a knave who becomes a dupe, is a thousand times more absurd a dupe than an honest man would be.

“Having made this observation, my dear cousin, let us return to the subject of your astonishment.

“Suddenly, one fine day, without any motive, (at least without any that you could make out) *you became mine without my becoming yours*, to adopt your own expression. From that moment you have always found me cold, contemptuous, and as careless about the past as if it did not exist—you are astonished at this sudden indifference; you talk of fiends, fatality, and I knew not what else. You asked me if I loved you, if at least I had taken a violent fancy to you. By no means, you are a delightful person, but I am unfortunate enough to have very bad taste. What, you will say, you felt neither passion, or love, or even the least little inclination, and yet—you—No, no, it is impossible, you will say again.

" You forget, my dear cousin, that there are passions of all kinds, and that love is by no means the most violent of all. You do not know then, that a woman like me will dare for the satisfaction of her hatred and her revenge, what she would never dare if she felt a passionate attachment, or if she even experienced a tender inclination. In the last case she would obey that instinct of coquettishness, which would teach her that a too easy triumph extinguishes a passing fancy.

" If, on the contrary, she passionately loved, oh ! she would be incapable of reasoning. Love, true and profound love, would inspire her with the most exquisite delicacy. If she *did* fall, she would fall, at least, with a kind of chaste and modest transport. In her blind enthusiasm she would not become conscious of her fault, till she had committed it, she would have all the remorse, all the shame, all the burning and bitter voluptuousness which that fault involves. In short, her feelings would be those of the noblest woman in the world, for true love often elevates the most abandoned hearts to an equal sublimity with the purest.

" What is this mystery then ? What are you to me ? you will ask again.

" Listen—I have hated your wife from the very instant when I became capable of analyzing my impressions, and distinguishing between good and evil.

" I have hated her, because, through my whole existence, there has not been one day, one hour, in which I have not been sacrificed to her, or in which she has not crushed me beneath her superiority.

" Never were envy and jealousy exalted to such a pitch. To wound her more surely, I determined to wound her in that which was her most precious possession on earth. I resolved to rob her of you, not because *I* had any inclination for you, for it was not the case, but because *she* adored you.

" Some days after that conversation to which Matilda was a listener, unknown to me, I had a long conversation with herself, in which she heaped a thousand reproaches upon me. She threatened me by her contempt, and I must now say by her just contempt. She exasperated my most evil feelings ; you asked me to meet you, I hastened that moment which would insure at the same time my revenge, and my influence over you : for then—but no, no, you shall never know the odious designs which I had formed—you would love me too much, and I want to detach you from myself.

" Now, recollect that on the evening of that day—*that day of happiness which had no to-morrow*, as you would say—Mademoiselle de Maran received some letters from Paris, and told you in my presence all the abominable calumnies of which Matilda was the victim.

" In spite of Mademoiselle de Maran's wicked exaggerations, I

saw in a minute that Matilda's reputation was horribly compromised in the eyes of the world. I thus also learned, by chance, that the woman, whose fancied happiness had exasperated me from my very childhood, was in fact the most miserable being in the world.

"Till then she had lived for you, and for virtue, she had always been deserving of the respect and affection of all—and her reputation was almost destroyed, and you neglected her for me—for me!

"This was too much.

"And now what has inspired the interest, the compassion which have suddenly replaced the hatred which I entertained towards Matilda? Is it a noble, a good feeling? or is it not rather the conviction that your wife, who is destined to an endless misery, can no longer be an object of envy to me—or perhaps my thorough acquaintance with your disposition, and with what that disposition will bring upon Matilda? Yes, it is rather some reason of this sort that has disarmed me. My revenge being more than satisfied by the future lot which your wife will receive at your hands, your love becomes perfectly useless to me—forgive me, cousin, for having *seduced you for nothing*.

"As far as poor Matilda is concerned, I unfortunately can do nothing for the past, but I can for the future.

"I am so singular a woman that from the moment when I began to pity her, I should have considered it a crime to give her the least cause of jealousy on your account.

"Here is the secret of my sudden coldness, this is why you must positively relinquish your playful little hope of *changing me from a panther into a lamb, of sharing my heaven or my hell*. God bless my soul, my dear cousin, I am neither a panther, or an angel, or a demon, I don't deal in heaven or hell—I am simply a poor woman who is by no means in love with you, and I vow to restore you to the friend of my childhood, a vow which I make the more readily because the sacrifice is a vastly agreeable one to me, so that my own immolation might almost pass for selfishness.

"You will allow me then not to *break the chains* which unite me to the best kind of man in the world, *in order to go and hide our love in a distant land*: there is no necessity for going so far to conceal a thing which does not exist. I also abdicate, with all the good will in the world, all my *sovereignty* over your heart—a thousand thanks for the fine kingdom which you so graciously deposit at my feet. I would rather live a slave under the protecting shade of a refreshing oasis, than reign over a dry and barren desert. Do not, above all, forget, I implore you, to spare me those proofs of devotion, those unheard of sacrifices, with which you threaten me, and of which I am totally unworthy—you would be terribly in my way, during the secret search which I am about to institute for my future tyrant, for I feel that I am destined to experience for

as *unchangeable* as

rant of my whole ex-  
point upon which I  
myself. But I am quite  
your sour looks would

intimacy with my hus-  
use you should be foolish

sudden departure, I shall  
were paying me somewhat  
thought it expedient to quit  
of mind, and to escape from

do for you, to come and try

ak of a good and an evil genius,  
generosity but merely an instinct  
back to her. She will be your

ifference for you, you obstinately  
me love you, I shall be, without

I believe it, but one can always get  
peless. Therefore, for the sake of  
y (be kind enough to take the word  
be importuned by a wearisome per-  
convince you of the utter fruitlessness

you still should entertain any hope.  
parent humility, you are full of an in-  
m, the more dangerous because you have  
it, with everybody else except with me.  
eve this. One never admits exceptions

yourself that you have made no impression  
le of persuading yourself that I break off  
nical manner, to escape from a sentiment  
esee with dread- -Too dangerous man! ah!  
allow yourself to be caught by one of those  
ded pride will certainly hold out to you, you

empt and aversion I should shew you the more  
aded you would believe yourself to be, in ac-  
axiom that one only keeps at a distance those

who are dangerous. As if those who bore one were not included in that category.

"Take care, take care, all your brilliant qualities would not then preserve you from inextinguishable ridicule, I should shew you no mercy for I should take up Matilda's cause; in tormenting you I should avenge her, and for the sake of avenging her I should be capable of feigning compassion, of feigning to be at last touched by so profound and so constant a love capable of making you all kinds of false promises, and of deluding you in the most atrocious manner.

"Once for all, be on your guard against me, as soon as I shall appear to feel anything but profound indifference towards you.

"Forget me then, cousin, for one who is worth me a thousand times over. Go back to Matilda, hers is a heart of gold, a soul that belongs not to this age or to this world.

"Now that, by a strange contradiction, her unhappiness interests me as much as her happiness used to revolt me, I can freely say that hers is one of those natures so excellent, so richly endowed, so prone to believe in good and to deny evil, because they are themselves made up of noble generosity, that a few appearances are sufficient to render them completely happy.

"Incapable of believing that falsehood exists, these poor souls have all the ingenuous confidence of childhood! It takes so little, to excite their simple and candid joy, that he must be a monster who would afflict them.

"You see it yourself; for the last week, you have, from prudential motives, feigned a return to her, and what a radiant expression of happiness has lighted up her enchanting countenance! And then she is a mother! she is a mother! and yet you had the shameful audacity to write to me—'*my wife's situation will prevent her going to Paris.*'

"Believe me, Monsieur de Lancry, I am capable and have been guilty of many evil actions, I know not what fresh ones the future may behold me commit, but never, I swear it, will I have to reproach myself with any equivalent to those atrocious words.

"Evidently you are the most ungrateful, the most egotistical, the most insensible of men, for passion depraves, instead of ennobling you! Nothing, however, can be more natural than this, for a depraved passion cannot elevate the heart which feels it.

"Beware too of your vanity, which will perhaps whisper to you that Lovelace and Don Juan were no better than yourself, and that my reproaches may be construed by *adorable scoundrel*.

"You would be singularly deceived: I, who am a female Don Juan, know what Don Juanism is worth; I am ever ashamed of seeing the passions which I inspire, display themselves with such evil instincts—like the sorcerer in the German tale, I recoil with a shudder of fear from the monster which I have produced, and

which demands with a loud voice, that I should become its companion.

"Forget me then, cousin ; once more if you persist in this insane love, I foretel that your end will be the most miserable one in the world, and you will make me believe in those divine recompenses and punishments, of which my insupportable mother-in-law was always talking.

"For a culprit like you a *punishment* like me would have been requisite, only, as this part of divine vengeance is rather a serious one for me, at my age, to support, I shall be infinitely obliged to you to spare me the trouble by reforming and becoming the most virtuous and faithful of husbands, which are but other words for the happiest and most adored of men, since Matilda is your wife.

"Adieu, adieu, adieu—and for ever. Remember above all things, that love has never had anything to do between us ; our brief connection has been but an infamous treason towards the noblest of women, *You have been my ACCOMPLICE*, never my **LOVER**."



## CHAPTER X.

M. SECHERIN TO URSULA.

WHEN Madame Sécherin perceived from our despair that I and Gontran had read the two letters which she had given to us, she read out the following letter from her son to Ursula, with a slow voice, as if to protract my cousin's torture still farther.

"I will never see you again, Ursula ; I despise even more than I detest you. God has punished me for not having listened to the counsels of my poor mother ; she, she at least is left to me, and with her I regret nothing. On the contrary, I thank Heaven for having delivered me from a monster of perfidy and corruption like yourself. I curse myself when I think that for you—for you, good God !—I could afflict, nay almost abandon that best of mothers. But be sure that my tenderness shall compensate her for the sufferings which I have inflicted upon her ; she will forgive me—she has forgiven me. When so dangerous and abominable a woman as you once enters a family, there is nothing which one must not expect. I am going to tell you something which will, I am sure, pain you. On the very day when, by the goodness of Divine Providence, I received that letter which displays all the atrocity of your heart—I had just drawn up a deed which secured my whole fortune to you, after my death. You, who are so fond of luxury, will now be poor—so much the better—so much the better ; that is the only misfortune which can reach you. The sixty thousand francs which

were your dowry, are this very day deposited at a notary's in Paris. Your father, too, will drive you from his presence, for I have sent him a copy of your abominable letter. And in conclusion, to inflict upon you one final blow which you will feel more acutely than all the rest, I can inform you that I do not suffer in the least from all your infamies. Do you hear? I do not suffer from them! No—no; it is all so odious, that I have no feeling towards you but one of horror, and I am happy—oh! very happy, to be for ever separated from you—my good and excellent mother will tell you so herself. That will be your last punishment.

Sécherin."

After having read out this letter, Madame Sécherin gazed implacably at Ursula.

The latter shook off at last the stupor in which she had been plunged since the beginning of this scene.

She rose from her seat with an imperious and haughty gesture, and with a smile that was both bitter and contemptuous, addressed Madame Sécherin.

"You are triumphant, are you not? blind and insane woman! You are exulting, while the heart of your son is mortally wounded."

"At this moment he has not even a thought for you," replied Madame Sécherin; "his letter tells you so, and thank God it is the truth!"

"I do not believe that letter," rejoined Ursula; "a man like him cannot forget a woman like me. Now hear me in your turn—Know, that if I chose, he should be at my feet to-morrow, begging me, with clasped hands, to return to him—but I do not choose. Destiny has struck me down at the very moment when I was yielding to a sentiment of almost mad generosity, at the very moment when I was pitying the woman whom I had hated and outraged, at the very moment when I was striving to repair the evil which I had done. Well then! alone I will struggle against destiny; a day will come—and ere long—when in his despair at losing me, your son will curse you for not having persuaded him to forgive me."

"Do you hear her? the wretch!" exclaimed Madame Sécherin, clasping her hands with horror. "Regret you? you? Heavens! what infernal pride!"

Ursula shrugged her shoulders with an expression of pity.

"You do not know, then, what I was, what I should have been to him? For he was simple, kind-hearted, and it was my amusement to make him happy, as it is one's amusement to watch the joy of a child. You have yourself heard him tell you if his happiness was great, if I was not everything to him! you exult without reflecting that he will weep—that he is weeping now, perhaps in tears of blood, for a past, which will ever be to him a dream, an ideal of human felicity. Blinded to my faults by love, to my conduct by

his confidence, his existence would have glided on in tranquil happiness—now it will be one of desolation ! Come you must be satisfied now ; I am poor, abandoned by all, even by my father ; you are avenged then, Matilda, and so also are you, sir,” said Ursula, addressing Gontran ; “ you Matilda, whose friendship I have betrayed, you sir, whose love I have ridiculed, And yet one thing is wanting to your triumph, and that is to see me destroyed and crushed beneath such unheard of a fatality, but I will not give you that joy ; I have will and energy, I was in one of those moments which can decide the whole fortune of an existence—one good feeling would perhaps have brought another after it—Fate has willed otherwise. Well ! I am only eighteen ; I have an iron disposition, a supple mind ; I am beautiful and bold ; may God have pity upon me !” said Ursula, concluding with this impious sarcasm.

Madame Sécherin remained in mute terror before that audacious woman.

Gontran gazed at her in anguish, not unmixed with admiration.

Suddenly Mademoiselle de Maran got up, pretended to wipe her eyes, and exclaimed—

“ Well then ! no—no ; it shall not be said at least that I remain insensible to this poor dear girl’s torments. I am quite moved at her angelic resignation ; it is impossible to confess one’s errors with more candour, and to be better disposed to contrition and repentance. Upon my word, all of you disgust me with your severity ; I shall take the dear little girl with me to Paris, and to my house there, and that too, this very blessed day, for she must not remain here a day longer—she would spoil such good people as you are !”

“ You dare to take her part ?” exclaimed Madame Sécherin, with indignation ; “ you dare to offer her an asylum—”

“ And pray why shouldn’t I, I should like to know ? Do you think I enter into all your Jeremiads about the desolation of abomination ? Wouldn’t one think that all Christianity is in a bad way or that the world is coming to an end, because your worthy son has had a little conjugal misfortune ? Is that a reason for all this shrill squalling against poor Ursula, and for trampling on her so unmercifully ? For a person who piques herself upon her religion as you do, my good lady, this is not very charitable.”

Madame Sécherin raised her eyes to Heaven, and said in a grave and solemn voice—

“ Oh Lord God ! have mercy upon that woman. Her tomb is open, her end approaches, and she blasphemes.” She then added in an imposing voice, and with so much authority in her accent, that Mademoiselle de Maran was thunderstruck for a moment. “ You support vice, you assault the tears of the virtuous, you deny God. But patience—patience. On your death-bed you will endure a fearful agony when you reflect on the evil you have committed, and on the torments which await you. You are so wicked and

so impious, that you will not find a priest who will pray for your soul."

After a moment's silence, Mademoiselle de Maran exclaimed, with her shrill, harsh laugh--

"Ha! ha! ha! how funny she is with her excommunications! I suppose my good lady, you are on the best possible terms with the thunderbolts of the Vatican? Just now you were coquetting with Heaven and Providence. Really I must say--without meaning to reproach you--that your notions of what is going on up there are somewhat trite, not to say a little vulgar. But make yourself easy, I shall be sure to have a nice little quarter of an hour to repent in, and a little *écus* to pay for a mass when the time comes to think of my salvation."

\* \* \* \* \*

That very evening Mademoiselle de Maran set off for Paris with Ursula.

Madame Sécherin departed to rejoin her son.

Gontran and myself were left alone at Maran.



## CHAPTER XI.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Two days passed without my seeing M. de Lancry.

The arrival and departure of Madame Sécherin having led our servants to conjecture that some serious domestic discussion had taken place between my husband and myself, they considered it their duty to go about their avocations in a still more silent and reserved manner than usual, and scarcely spoke to one another except in whispers. You would have supposed that some one was dying in the house. It is impossible to describe the sinister aspect of that vast and mute château, gloomy and deserted as it was, one wing being inhabited by myself, and the other by Gontran.

I had wished to be alone that I might prepare myself for the interview which must necessarily take place between myself and my husband.

During those two days, by some moral phenomenon which even now I cannot explain to myself, a profound and complete revulsion had suddenly taken place in my nature.

It was my duty to speak to my husband with the utmost frankness.

This event was the most important of my whole existence and its effect will endure to my last day.

The least details of that interview are still ineffaceably fixed on my memory.

It was a Sunday, and after having heard low mass and remained a considerable time at my devotions, I returned home.

It was a gloomy and melancholy day, and as I entered the château, a fall of snow came on.

The clock in my drawing-room struck ten.

My apartment was a little *salon* very simply furnished, and where I usually spent my time ; it had two windows which opened upon the park ; on either side of the chimney-piece were hanging portraits of my father and mother, and upon my writing table lay a miniature of Gontran.

As regards this miniature, I will mention here what I discovered afterwards, that it had been returned to my husband by Madame de Richeville.

To give his wife a portrait, which had in other days been painted for his mistress, is one of those simply disgraceful actions in which a man indulges himself, without even having an idea of all that is odious and insulting in such a proceeding.

By the side of my work table was a little rose-wood book-case which held my favourite books, and my piano stood between the two windows.

I looked at myself in a mirror as I passed it, I was fearfully pale and thin, my cheek bones, already a little prominent and slightly tinged with crimson, were evidences of the fever which had been consuming me for the last two days : my eyes were very bright and animated, but my lips had a violet hue, and my hands were like ice.

I was dressed in black, and my hair was in bands, for I had not thought of having it curled.

I contemplated with a kind of gloomy satisfaction the ravages which sorrow had worked upon my features, and I compared myself to Ursula, who was always so fresh and blooming.

My husband entered my room as the old clock of the château was striking half past ten.

He too was cruelly changed in the last two days, his paleness was extreme, his eyes were red with want of sleep—perhaps with tears—he seemed completely overcome, and his countenance had almost a savage expression.

“ I will not attempt to deny it,” he abruptly began, “ I have wronged you—immensely wronged you. You must detest me—be it so then—detest me.”

“ I implore you to listen to me, Gontran, our relative positions will be fixed to-day, and it is my duty to tell you with the most complete frankness, the result of my reflections, and my immovable determination.”

“ I am listening to you.”

“ During the two days I have been spending alone, all the events

which have taken place since my first acquaintance with you, have, by some strange optical effect of my imagination, risen up before me in a single moment as it were. I have been able to appreciate them at once both in their united effect and in their details, and I have analysed them with a certainty and elevation of judgment, which has even astonished myself. In this contemplating by-gone days, I have perceived, and with no blind pride, that my devotion to you has never failed, and that I have performed miracles of tenderness to preserve my love pure and inviolate notwithstanding your contemptuous indifference. With the exception of a few rarely uttered complaints, torn from me by intolerable suffering, I have ever endured all with resignation; at the slightest symptom of tenderness in you, I dried my tears in an instant, I came to you with a smile upon my lips, and hopes of happiness—hopes so often deceived—were once more born in my bosom.

"It is true—but it is not generous in you to bring forward now, as a contrast, my errors and your own virtues" said Gontran with bitterness.

"If I speak to you in this way, Gontran, it is not to praise myself for having always acted in that manner, but on the contrary to blame myself for it."

"What, do you regret?"

"I regret having done precisely what was calculated to make myself miserable, without rendering you happy, perhaps even you would have been less cruel to me—if I had behaved differently."

"What do you mean?"

"It will seem strange to you—but the result of my reflections has been almost to accuse myself, and to acquit you."

"Acquit me?"

"Yes, acquit you—the scales have fallen from my eyes, Gontran, I have never been to you, a noble companion, with the consciousness of her own dignity, and with firmness of character to make herself respected. I have been your cowardly slave, and have only possessed the negative qualities of slavery, blind submission, stupid resignation, and un-energetic patience. Seeing me thus you had a right to treat me as you have treated me, and to shew me neither mercy or compassion."

"I do not know what is your motive in wishing to make me out so innocent" said Gontran looking at me with distrust.

"I might tell you that it is to render less painful to you the avowal which I have still to make, but I should be speaking falsely were I to say so: if I do not wish to hurt you without a cause, I still feel but little uneasiness now, as to whether you will suffer or not at what it is my duty to tell you."

My husband appeared struck at the cold carelessness of my expression.

"This language is new from you to me, Matilda."

"It is right that it should be as new, as the feelings which

dictates it—as new as the avowal which I am about to make to you.”

“Pray, explain yourself!”

“After this long backward glance at the past, I made another discovery—a fearful discovery, I swear to you, it is, that my sorrows (sincere and bitter as they were) were scarcely worthy of inspiring a feeling of interest—it is that my continual lamentations were more wearisome than touching—it is that my eternal tears must, and with reason, have put you out of patience, and exasperated you, but seldom have aroused a feeling of pity in your heart.”

“Are you serious, Matilda? This would be but a cruel railery”

I took my husband by the hand, and led him to the mirror, and pointing to the reflection of my haggard features, I said to him:

“I must have suffered much, to become so changed, must I not Gontran? Well then, judge what I felt when reason compelled me to confess that my sufferings were scarcely deserving of compassion, when I said to myself—I might relate those sufferings to an impartial judge to-morrow, and he would have a right to reply, “*It is your own fault*”—Well then, in the presence of such a conviction as that, do you believe, Gontran, I have courage for railery?”

“And that is really your conviction, Matilda?”

“It is—yes, the world might know to-morrow, one by one all the tortures which I have endured, and it would say with a shrug of contempt—“What a stupid—tiresome creature she is with her continual sighs and lamentations! She has got no more than she deserves. Couldn’t she be a virtuous and unhappy woman without making herself insupportable? After all, her disposition, so weak, so complaining, and so susceptible, is almost enough to excuse her husband’s brutality. Certainly, Ursula is very perfidious, very audacious, very corrupt, but still one can understand that M. De Lan-cry should prefer her a thousand times over to Matilda, for Ursula at least has fascination and piquancy; one finds in her, those alternations of good and evil which, so to speak, always keep the soul and heart on the *quiver*: Matilda, on the contrary is a specimen of perpetual weeping and monotonous resignation, it is true, she may love every kind of virtue, no one thinks of denying that—but she certainly has not the knack of rendering virtue amiable. In a word, she is a woman who falls into the greatest error of all, that of being unable to inspire the love which she feels”—That is what the world would say, Gontran—and that is what it would have a right to say, judging from its own deductions.—Some compassionate souls might pity me perhaps when they reflected that my life with you might be condensed into these words—‘To love nobly—suffer and be resigned’—Yes, *they* might pity me perhaps, but they would only pity—and there is a whole abyss between pity and—sympathy!”

“What language, Matilda?”

“Well then, again, do you believe, Gontran, that I am thinking

of railery, when I tell you that after shedding so many tears, I have not even the consolation left of believing myself to be deserving of interest ?”

“And what in God’s name can have impressed you with this fatal conviction ?” exclaimed Gontran.

“Reason ! but the heart must be very empty, very deserted for her severe voice to resound therein !”

“What do you say ? your heart !”

“My heart is empty and deserted since I have ceased to love you, Gontran---And it is only since I *have* ceased to love you, that I have been able to judge my conduct and your own with impartiality.”

“You have ceased to love me ?” he exclaimed.

“I have---and this it is which makes me look upon everything so disinterestedly, this it is which leaves me no fear of afflicting you by addressing you as I am now doing---had they told me that the immense love which I felt for you---that love which had resisted such hard trials, would soon diminish, I should have exclaimed that it was sacrilege to say---and yet that love---is extinguished.”

“Matilda---Matilda !”

“It was completely extinguished in those few seconds which I took to read the letter you had written for Ursula---I do not reproach you, Gontran, I have no longer any right to do so---you lose a heart like mine ; and---I say it with no vanity---you are sufficiently punished---I have not now to hope or fear that the nature of my sentiments towards you will become changed. I know myself well enough to see, that, unfortunately, I am destined to feel nothing by halves, the wise course would perhaps have been to love you less violently, and to lose that love less speedily. I know it, but my nature is different. There is no philtre to revive deceased affection : I cannot explain it, I can only feel that it is deceased ; doubtless my love for you, had been long, and without my own knowledge, *undermined* by my tears, and one violent shock was sufficient to make it crumble into ruins at once : your letter to Ursula was an indisputable proof to me, that I must for ever bid adieu to all hope, and my love was necessarily dashed to pieces and destroyed when it came into contact with an impossibility. All I know is, that while I read that letter, my heart became paralysed by a slow, but profound, and almost physical coldness. A comparison will give you an idea of what I felt---it was not an impetuous whirlwind which mingled together and dashed one against another the most contrary passions, in my heart, as the tempest bows down and shakes everything in its fury---no---no---at least when the storm has passed, if everything has cruelly suffered, still everything is not destroyed,---but what I felt, was a dull and gradually increasing encroachment---which froze up, and annihilated my love,---like those

silent inundations mounting still higher and higher, till everything is swallowed up beneath their frightful surface, and till they offer nothing more to the terrified eye than an immense and mute desert, where nothing—nothing has survived.”

My husband, stupified at first, replied with repressed irritation ; “The very suddenness which marked the disappearance of your affection for me, proves that disappearance not to be genuine. Certainly I have erred—deeply erred—towards you ; but I do not deserve such a treatment as this.”

“It is ; and as I expected, your self-love, Gontran, revolts at the thought, that I cannot love you any longer—that I have ceased to love you. I can even conceive that, as you say, the suddenness of the change may keep up your illusions on this point ; but you are deceiving yourself—I have never been misled by my own impressions.”

My husband shrugged his shoulders.

“You once thought you should always love me ; you told me so yourself, and yet you see at this moment you fancy your love is extinguished ; it will be the same too with your aversion—that, too, will have its limit.” he added, with imperturbable confidence.

“The comparison you make, Gontran, is not a just one. I should have always loved you—I am sure of it, if you had not done everything to destroy that love. I will tell you with equal frankness, that you might do everything in the world now to overcome my profound indifference without success.”

“But after all, my conduct has only been flighty and inconsiderate ; it is nothing but a breach of my marriage vows ; and there is not a woman in the world, who, when the first moment of offended vanity was over, would not forgive such a fault.”

“I do not deny it, I do not assert that all women think, or ought to think, as I do. Doubtless I am wrong, it is one of the misfortunes of my fate to be invariably accused, or rather it is one of the faults of my disposition to be always in extremes.”

“But once more, if your aversion to me is only caused by the letter I wrote to your cousin, it is not justified.”

“I do not wish to indulge in recrimination upon the past, Gontran, only, as you chose to mention that letter, and you must acknowledge that there was not one of its expressions which would not inflict a mortal wound upon hopes the most obstinate. You wounded me incurably, as a woman, as a wife, as a mother. Nor was this all : that passion to which you sacrificed me, without hesitation, and without pity, has been, is still, and ever will be, the sole real passion of your existence—you will see that my prophecies will come true. I confess it without false humility, or rather with pride, I have none of the requisites for an advantageous contest with Ursula, if, notwithstanding

ing, her promises she chosed to continue her seducing arts towards you, nor have I now any compensation of the heart to offer you, should she persevere in her indifference to your attentions. Nor is this all, you will forgive my harshness, it costs me much to speak to you in this way—while I still loved you, I blinded myself so thoroughly as to certain circumstances of your life, that, unable as I was to excuse them, I had ended by persuading myself that, placed in a similar position, I should have been as culpable as yourself—but now my illusions have vanished; your conduct appears to me in its true colours, and even admitting that I could forget the wrongs you have done me, and your breach of the marriage vow, as you call it, it would be impossible for me any longer to love a man, whom I could no longer esteem."

"Matilda, what is the meaning of this?"

"Before my marriage—before I had been subjugated by the fascinations of a most insane passion, if I had known what I have known since, I would not have been your wife."

"But, once more, madame, what do you know to prevent you esteeming me? for I do not suppose one is a dishonourable man merely because one feels an insurmountable passion for a woman who is undeserving of it—admitting what you assert, to be the truth."

After one last moment of hesitation, I related to Gontran all the scene in M. Lugarto's isolated house, and the manner in which M. de Mortagne, and M. de Rochegune had forced that man to restore the document which had been forged by Gontran.

My husband was thunderstruck.

During my brief narrative, he did not utter a word.

The terms on which I now was with him, prevented my feeling any further scruples, there must be no more such secrets, no more such discretion between us, I was bent on fixing frankly and at once my future position towards my husband. If I chose to be generous hereafter, at least I would not appear a dupe now.

I perceived, from the gloomy looks which he every now and then directed towards me, while he was walking in an agitated manner up and down the room, that, as M. de Mortagne had foreseen, my husband would never forgive me for having become acquainted with that fatal action of his.

After a few moments of this hurried pacing, Gontran sat down in an arm chair and covered his face with his hands.

I could not help pitying him.

"I love you, it is true, no longer," I said, "you have committed a guilty action, but nevertheless I bear your name. You are the father of my child, and this is sufficient to assure you that, although you have for ever lost a heart which burned with the purest affection, there still, in the eyes of the world, remains to you a wife, and that wife will never fail in the duties imposed upon her by her position

towards yourself. In appearance then, nothing will be changed in our intercourse. Had it not been for the calumnies of which we are victims, I should have requested you to agree to a separation by mutual consent, but in spite of Mademoiselle de Maran's assertions, I fancy we should both be losers by such an exposure. It will be better then for us to live as we are now living, for some time longer and hereafter we will act as circumstances may render advisable."

"Be it so," abruptly replied Gontran, "I shall not attempt to overcome your prejudices—henceforth we will live apart, and I will deliver you as soon as I can from my odious presence—you do not forget your injuries—and you are right."

"I assure you, that now I have completely forgotten them, and had I an opportunity of avenging them, I would not do it. The effect exists, the causes are now a subject of indifference to me."

After a moment's silence, Gontran exclaimed :

"No, no ! it is impossible, so much coldness cannot have succeeded to so much devotion, you cannot treat me with so much cruelty—especially at a moment——"

"When you require consolation, perhaps," I replied. "I will therefore assure you that it is not jealousy which would prevent my pitying you, but respect for human nature ; I see too well that the passion which you feel will be fatal to you, not to be terrified at such a prospect—I shall never be insensible to any misfortune which may happen to you."

"After all," exclaimed Gontran, hastily rising, "I must be mad to take all this so much to heart ! As you justly observe, madame, our position henceforth is plainly defined. You are no longer in love with me ; well and good ; an establishment can go on very well without love. My presence is disagreeable to you ; I will spare it you as much as possible. You will live in your own way, and I in mine. I have not the slightest opposition in the world to offer to your prospects."

"Only, Gontran, there is one very delicate point which remains for me to touch upon—I wish two thirds of my fortune to be settled in such a way, that the future lot of our child may be secured."

"That regards me, madame—I will attend to it."

"I think it right to tell you, that, being completely ignorant of business matters myself, and wishing the one in question to be executed with all due regularity, I shall consult M. de Mortagne on the subject."

"I will never have any communication with that man, madame."

"I do not ask it. You will be good enough to supply me with the proofs that my intentions will be duly put into execution. If M. de Mortagne considers the documents satisfactorily drawn up and sufficient for the purpose, it is all I require at your hands."

"All this, madame, cannot be done as you wish. The future

lot of our child concerns me as much as it does yourself, it is my place—and mine only, to make due provisions on that score, and I will do everything that is necessary for that purpose, without your exercising any control over affairs which regard myself exclusively.”

“ You do not choose to give me any certain security for what I ask you, Gontran ?”

“ No, Madame.”

“ It is my duty then to give you notice, that I shall employ every possible method to attain my purpose.”

“ As you please, Madame. You are free to do so.”

Such was the end of my interview with Gontran.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE DESPAIR OF PASSION.

A FEW days after this interview, M. de Lancry sent to Paris his *valet-de-chambre*, in whom he had implicit confidence.

After that man's departure my husband received a letter almost daily from him.

I awaited with as much impatience as uneasiness M. de Mortagne's answer. I had written to him twice. I could not account for his silence.

My life continued a melancholy and monotonous one. I sometimes felt astonished that love should have been so suddenly replaced by indifference—and yet it was no more than natural.

Violent and profound feelings cannot go through all the pale transitions of a gradual coldness.

They continue in existence, or they vanish as they came—suddenly, after having long and valiantly resisted the most cruel attacks.

Yes, those feelings fall and die at once, like the warrior who discovers, but at the moment of death, that he is pierced with wounds, and that he has lost all his blood in the battle.

One thing more surprised me, and I did not know whether to be proud or ashamed of it. This loss of affection froze up my very heart, but many circumstances of my life had been more painful.

Was it courage ? was it resignation ? or, was it indifference ?

I soon discovered the secret of my conduct.

I consoled myself for no longer loving M. de Lancry, by the reflection that all the powers of my soul would be henceforth concentrated upon one being. Did my heart still deceive me ? was not to idolize *his* child a continuance of my love for Gontran ?

I could not then deceive myself; maternal love filled my whole heart, and that love alone was the cause of my firmness. For when unfortunately I reflected that the divine hope bestowed upon me by heaven, was *only a hope*; when I asked myself what would be the dreary void of my heart, if that hope were snatched from me—oh! then my brain turned giddy, and I averted my eyes from that dark abyss, to cast them once more towards the radiant future which was now my only tie to existence.

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Winter had arrived with its cold gloom, its melancholy fogs, and its long evenings, to which the sweet intercourse of a domestic hearth brought no abridgment. I exchanged a few words with Gontran, at breakfast and dinner, and then we each returned, to our respective apartments.

His habits of life were completely changed.

He had given up the sports of the field, but went out every day on foot in the woods, (not heeding the inclemency of the season), and after remaining there several long hours, he would return with scrupulous punctuality at post time, after which he set off once more, and sometimes did not come in till it was quite night. At other times he would remain for two or three days shut up in his own room, where his meals were carried to him, and then he never left his apartment. His features began to be fearfully altered, his hollow cheeks, his sunken eyes, and the nervous smile which contracted his lips, lent an expression of pain, of sorrow, and of despair to his countenance which I had never seen it wear.

When the post time arrived he could not conquer his anxiety, and would go himself to meet the man who brought the letters. One day, from one of my windows I saw him receive a letter, look at it for some time as though he dreaded to open it, devour its contents, and then tear it into pieces and trample upon it with fury.

Thrice he had everything prepared for his departure, and then postponed it.

One evening I was in my dressing-room with Blondeau, engaged with a box of child's dresses which I had sent for from England, when suddenly Gontran, pale, disfigured with emotion, almost out of his senses, entered the room, and exclaimed in a heart-breaking tone of voice—"Matilda! I can no longer—" but seeing Blondeau, he abruptly broke off, and disappeared. I went to look for him; but he was shut up in his own room, and I remained for a long time at his door, which he would not open.

Another day he threw aside the careless dress which he usually wore, paid the utmost attention to his toilet, came into my room, and said to me with a bewildered look,

"Tell me, frankly, what you think of me? Am I much changed? In a word, am I no longer capable of pleasing? or do I look as handsome as I used to do?"

I gazed at him with surprise. He stamped upon the ground and exclaimed with violence—"I ask you if I am much changed, do you hear?"

My astonishment had given way to fear; there was such an appearance of insanity in the question, and in the look with which he asked it, I did not know what answer to make. He left the room in a perfect fury, after having broken a China cup which was standing upon a table.

At last, shall I confess it! Blondeau found out from our *maitre-d'hôtel*, that M. de Lancry sometimes got intoxicated at night, with strong liqueurs which he had carried to him in his room.

I could doubt it no longer; these excesses, these fits of fury, all the fantastical caprices of Gontran, proved to me that he was experiencing the violent agitations of a despairing passion, and that he sought sometimes to find, in intoxication, oblivion of his sufferings. The pity with which he inspired me, induced me to believe that all love was for ever extinguished in my heart. I was deeply grieved at seeing him so unhappy. I bitterly accused Ursula, but I no longer felt any jealousy of her.

In my great regret I felt that I could do nothing for Gontran, and that any attempt at consolation from me would be fruitless. Indeed I did not choose or dare to begin upon such a subject with him, I therefore waited for a favourable opportunity.

One day, the postman having arrived a little sooner than usual, my husband's letters were taken into the library where I found him; when I went to look for a book.

He broke the seal with emotion; read, turned pale, let the letter drop, and hid his face in his hands. I approached him; deeply moved.

"Gontran," I said to him, "you are suffering——"

He started and hastily raised his head.

He was weeping!

An expression of profound despair was upon his withered features.

"Well! Yes! I am suffering," he replied bitterly. "What does that signify to you?"

"Listen to me, Gontran," I said to him, taking his burning and wasted hand, "there are sorrows for which I can pity you now——"

"You? you?——"

"Yes, precisely because I love you no longer, I can—I ought to bring you the consolation of a friend—you are suffering—I need not ask for the cause of the change which I have for some time remarked in you."



THE MASQUE BALL.

The Masque Ball.



"Well, then—yes!" he exclaimed, losing all command of himself; "why should I put any restraint upon myself with you now? Yes, I *love her* passionately; yes, I love her like a child: like a madman—yes, I love her as no one ever loved—and yet her contempt is pitiless; it is on my account that she is ruined, and she will not even suffer me to acquire any rights from the injury which I have inflicted upon her. For after all I am bound in honour to protect her now—and—but, forgive me—forgive me! I am saying this to you—to *you*—oh! my God!"

"And you may say it to me, Gontran; you are telling nothing that I was not aware of; I can no longer have any doubt of the passion which is destroying you—fatal, fatal passion! which has already cost me my happiness, and which causes you nothing but suffering."

"Oh! yes, fatal—very fatal! You do not know what it has cost me in tears, in hidden despair, in fits of powerless fury, in mad or criminal resolutions! You do not know the ignoble forgetfulness which I have sought in intoxication. Oh! that infernal woman well knew what a passion she was creating my heart! an infamous and horrible passion, to which I have already sacrificed you—you! And yet fool, or rather madman that I am, that passion increases every day in spite of myself; twice I have been on the point of going to join her, but I dared not; with a disposition so untractable as that woman's, a mistaken step may ruin everything—and in spite of myself again, I preserve a glimmering of hope. But good God! forgive me again; I irritate—I wound you."

"I can bear everything now, I swear to you, Gontran, it is a melancholy compensation for what we have both lost."

"Oh! I know it, I know it! I can no longer count upon your love; I must renounce that, but do not be utterly merciless, let me pour out my heart before you. Now that you love me no longer, it cannot hurt you—believe me, Matilda, I am so miserable that to confess to you what I endure, is almost to avenge you upon myself. Oh! if you knew what it is to suffer from a mute and concentrated misery!"

"I do know what it is, Gontran, I *do* know."

"Twenty times I have been on the point of throwing myself at your knees, of confessing everything to you, and of asking you at least for your pity. But all the past wrongs which I have done you recurred to my mind; I was ashamed of myself; I did not dare—I devoured my tears in silence—Yes, for I am weeping, you see I am; I am weak; I cry like a child."

And he wept still; then drying his tears, he exclaimed,

"But she is without pity, that woman; she does not consi-

der all that I have sacrificed for her—you, noble and generous creature, as noble and generous as she is perverse and infamous—she does not consider this—but she does not think then that my infatuation may have a term ; whatever she may say, her infernal pride is flattered to see me at her feet, and she does not know that the illusion once dissipated, there would remain for her no other sentiments than contempt and hatred. Oh ! her vanity may yet receive a cruel blow in seeing me return to you—you, whom she has always envied, whatever she may say—

“ A return to the past is impossible, Gontran ; you must renounce for ever the thoughts of humbling, in that manner, the pride of Ursula.”

“ Very well, despise me, Matilda, but I cannot conceal from you, it is since you said those words to me, so cruel from your lips, ‘ I no longer love you,’ that I have felt all I have lost in losing you ; yes, what renders my grief more cutting still is, that I can no longer say—I have always near me, a heart, noble, loving, generous, which will forget and pardon, and to which I can always return with confidence, because its goodness is inexhaustible.”

“ Yes, that heart ~~was~~ thus yours—oh ! how solely yours, Gontran.”

“ But that heart is still mine ; you mistake, Matilda ; a love like yours leaves in the heart a root that cannot be extracted from it, it may languish for a time, but it will revive with double force. Matilda, do not despair, help me to conquer this abominable passion ; I swear to you, that I have never more appreciated all that is great and elevated in your heart. Oh ! what will be that woman’s rage, if she believes us happy together, united, and tenderly engrossed with each other ! what a mortal blow her pride will receive. Yes, Matilda, we will have no pity on her ; let us go to Paris, and *affect* to appear before her more passionately in love than ever, she then will feel the agonies that she has made us suffer.”

This strange proposal convinced me of the excitement of Gontran, and to what a degree passion is always blind and selfish.

He could not, at that time, have any intention of wounding me, and yet he proposed to me to act a hideous part in order to excite the jealousy of Ursula !

“ In times past,” said I to my husband, “ those words would have wounded me horribly—to day, they only make me smile with sadness. Alas ! does love so blind you that you do not perceive that the proposal of returning to your former passion for me, is only a fresh proof of the irresistible power that Ursula exercises over you.”

“ But that is frightful. If that woman is never to love me,” cried he, “ if she laugh at my sufferings, if her disdain is not a *ruse* of her coquetry, why cannot I renounce the hope of being

loved by her one of these days? why do I find a bitter pleasure even in the grief that she causes me to feel? why do I adore her still, since I know her to be dissimulating, perfidious, and indifferent to my love?"

"My God! my God!" cried I, clasping my hands, "Your will is all-powerful; to punish Gontran you make him endure all the suffering that *he* inflicted on me!"

"What do you mean, Matilda?"

"Do you know, Gontran, that there is something retributive in what has occurred. When I felt for you a blind and obstinate passion, I also asked myself, 'If Gontran love me no longer, why have I this rooted hope of still regaining his affections? why does not his indifference and his harshness cure me of it?' Like you, I thus questioned myself, Gontran, and I found a sort of bitter satisfaction in indulging my grief—like you; each day I encountered fresh proofs of contempt with a sort of despairing confidence; like you, without doubt, I spent long nights in questioning and meditating on that sad mystery of my soul."

"Oh! is there anything more frightful than to feel oneself led away by a sentiment so irresistible?" cried Gontran, so entirely absorbed by himself as to forget that it was to me he was speaking; "oh! is it not—is it not frightful to know that reason, duty, honour, and one's own will are all insufficient to cure that fatal intoxication."

"You paint, with terrible colours the ills that you have entailed on me, Gontran; but for me, in loving you, notwithstanding your indifference. I followed the path of duty; it was the excess of a virtuous love; in loving that woman, notwithstanding her disdain, you yield to a guilty passion; it is with you, the excess of a criminal love."

For a moment silenced, the incurable egotism of M. De Lancry soon shewed itself again, he exclaimed,

"By heavens! there is a gulph between your character and mine—you are a poor young woman, weak and without energy; you know nothing of life and its passions; but that is not the case with me; after all it shall never be said that a country girl of eighteen, unknown, without consistency and now without character, abandoned by every one, shall play upon me in that manner, she flies me, she will not consent to see me, then she fears me—oh I can understand that haughty and insolent disposition of hers, fears to meet with a master—vanity does not blind me, she tries to deceive herself, she is so deceitful, she fears me so much that in her letter to destroy all suspicion of the influence that I exercise over her, she attributes before hand to my self love, the just confidence that all her conduct ought to inspire me with, for she said these words to me "*do not let your pride imagine that I avoid you because I fear you.*" It is so! it is so! I have no longer any doubt—I despaired too

soon, she fears me—then she loves me. Love had rendered me as blind as a school boy : Oh Matilda you shall be revenged."

I interrupted my husband—"Listen to me Gontran ! A moment ago I saw you miserable, and though the cause of your unhappiness was an insult to me, yet I could not help pitying sufferings, that I had experienced myself, and forgot that it was you who caused them ; how that hope revives once more in your heart, you express it to me with so much undisguised satisfaction, that I should feel ashamed of myself if I said another word to you ?"

"Matilda, forgive me. My God ! I am distracted."

"But I have possession of my reason, and I give you this last caution. Ursula is more cunning than you are ; and you will fall into the trap she has laid for you."

"A trap ! a trap !"

"If she had left you without a ray of hope, you would perhaps, have forgotten her ; but in making you believe that she avoids you from the fear of loving you too much, she retains her influence over you, and wounds me, without apparent cause of complaint, since in ceasing to see you she keeps her promise."

"That is attributing an odious motive to a conduct that is highly generous," cried M. de Lancry.

This reproach disgusted me.

"And what is that woman's generosity ! after having wounded me in the tenderest point, she tells me 'I have never loved your husband, but I involved him in a disgraceful treachery ; now I repent of it, and I swear to you I will never see him again.' What a sacrifice ! after having done me all the harm possible, she gives up the man whom she has never loved !"

"But in acknowledging her fault, she put her future destiny in your hands, madam, and you have seen that she did not exaggerate the inflexible severity of her husband."

"And did she not know sir, that I was incapable of injuring her ; had I not already given her proof after proof of my fondness towards her—my weakness, I must call it ; cease, then, to praise so highly, what you call the generosity of that woman ; she can never repair the ill she has done me."

Indignant at the egotism of M. de Lancry, I rose to quit the room, but he approached me with confusion, and taking my hand,

"Forgive me," said he sadly, "forgive me ; I am ashamed of what I have said ; I feel alas ! how much it must have wounded you ; it was so good of you to listen to me ; forgive me, once more, for I am so wretched ; I find myself without strength for this struggle ; my energies are weakened, I have no longer the power to *will* ; each day I retract the resolutions formed the previous one."

And that man, whose character was in general so harsh and unyielding, shed tears afresh.

That proof of his disgraceful weakness caused me to feel disgust rather than pity towards him.

"What is to be done," said I to him; "what is to be done, I ask you? You must at last behave like an honest man, whose heart is in its right place. Listen to me, Gontran; I am no longer blinded in my appreciation of your character, and the time is come when I must speak to you with blunt sincerity; my future fate, your own, and our child's, all depend on the resolution you will make to-day. You married me without loving me; you have committed an action which borders closely on dishonour; you have, up to this time, rendered me the most wretched of women; you are nourishing a miserable passion——"

"More reproaches—have a little pity on me, Matilda."

"If I remind you of the past, it is to point clearly out to you, your own position and mine, and to answer your inquiry, 'what can be done?' I am going to tell you. This very day at the moment that I am speaking to you, it depends on you, even now, to secure to yourself a happy and honorable existence; to-morrow, perhaps, it may be too late."

"Instruct me how—console me—help me, Matilda; you can suggest nothing but what is noble and good. I will follow your advice."

"You have youth, courage, abilities, and riches; you are fortunate in this, that no proof can be brought forward of any dishonorable action; truth and falsehood are so mixed up in all the reports circulated in the world, that good people will hesitate to pronounce any judgment against you. Change your mode of life, become useful, render an account to yourself of your actions, and the good opinion of the world will be restored to you."

"But how? By what means?"

"Until now, except your military services, your life has been an idle and dissipated one; give it some object; serve your country; occupy yourself. Are there not many honorable employments you might fulfil? have you not been a military man? have you not been employed in the diplomatic line?"

"I would neither ask for, or accept, any employment under this government."

"You are right; that feeling is accounted for by the gratitude you owe to the family who have loaded yours with benefits, and to whom my parents also were devoted. You belong to the side which clings to the rights and hopes of the royal family; well, then join its brave defenders."

"Do you then advise me to go to La Vendée?"

"I do not advise you to take part in the civil war; are there no other means to serve that party?"

"How?"

"In the Chamber of Deputies, for instance. Is there not a place there you could take amongst the royalists?"

"In the Chamber of Deputies! what chance should I have there?"

"If you would try, you might have a good one; the estates that you possess here, and the principles which were professed by and are remembered of my family, from whom they are descended, all favour you; try for your election; seize hold of that hope, and let all your thoughts be turned towards it. Your understanding is good and brilliant, give it solidity and steadiness; if you wish to represent your country, study its laws, its government; give the finish, by serious study, to the advantages you already possess in knowledge of the world. You are surrounded by your farmers and tenants, the people on whom an election depends; exercise towards them the charm of manner you possess when you choose; inform yourself of their interests, their wants; make yourself beloved amongst them; until now they have seen in you nothing but an idle indifference towards the grand questions which are agitating the country; shew them that you are capable of better things, prove to them that you are descended from noble ancestors, will defend the principles which you believe to be salutary, and the rights which you believe divine; and yet advocate the pious and noble cause of those who work and suffer in the defence of their country. Employ in useful studies the long winter evenings; every day go over your estate; be good, just, and affable; you will gain all hearts; by dint of services and benevolent actions you will render yourself necessary to them, and the day will come when you will reap the good effects of your labour. Give that turn to your thoughts, Gontran, and then you will be successful, you will conquer the disgraceful passion which enervates and engrosses you; you will not, it is true, have near you, to encourage you in that noble career, a heart any longer filled with the most passionate love, but you will have at least, a sincere friend, who will appreciate any effort, praise any exertion, and bless you for having the courage to shew yourself good and persevering, and who will remind you that the task you have imposed on yourself will not only deliver you from a miserable weakness, but will ennoble the name that our child will bear; and then, Gontran, perhaps when I see you so changed, so good, so happy—for you will feel satisfied with yourself—perhaps my sad heart which now feels dead and cold towards you, may, by one of those miracles with which Heaven recompenses good actions, revive in its love to you, but if, on the contrary, the blow it has received is mortal, still my friendship, the education of our child, the good opinion of the world, your renown, and a praiseworthy ambition, will all combine to occupy you sufficiently, perhaps, to lessen your regrets for that love, in the marriage state which you used to talk of.

"It is not I—it is the force of circumstances which have destroyed that hope; we have passed happy days.

"Too happy, Gontran! one of *your* faults has been the having made me too happy, knowing that such felicity was not to last. My fault was, in believing in the continuance of such happiness. When a reverse came I had not courage to bear it, my feelings had become morbidly sensitive, and I could only suffer. It required this complete dis-illusion, to restore me to myself and to reason; perhaps such firm and reasonable language as I have addressed to you to day might have inspired you with noble desires, and crushed meaner ones, I should have raised you in your own estimation and in mine, but let me repeat it again—I had faith in your professions, and the deception has been to me most terrible: during the struggle between my love and your indifference, my reason was weakened and obscured, but I feel now, that it is fortified, strengthened and increased by the conviction of the new duties which are imposed on me—now I see, and judge, and speak quite differently.

"Differently indeed I said Gontran, who had listened to me with an increasing surprise that took from him the power of interrupting me—how Matilda! can it be you that I hear—you, always so weak—so resigned?"

"Well answer me Gontran, would you again repeat to me with tears, those words so unworthy of you 'what can I do to fight against the unreasonable passion that governs me?'"

"No! No! cried M. De Lancry, no, you shall be as you ever were, my guardian angel: your noble, though severe, observations have opened to me a new horizon—yes I will struggle against, I will conquer, this absorbing passion. I shall have a double motive to act upon, to re-establish my character in your estimation and that of the world, and to regain the affections of the noble heart that I have lost—oh best of women, when I compare your elevated language to the satirical falsehood of Ursula's, when I compare the pure and salutary emotion it causes me, the generous feelings it creates in my mind, to the bitter resentment that her ironical wit always made me feel, I cannot understand how I could ever have sacrificed you to her, Oh! Matilda, to give me courage to strengthen my resolution, let me believe that the estrangement of your heart towards me will soon cease! this new life will be so happy, shared with you, tender and loving as you used to be."

"That is impossible, Gontran, I repeat again you will find in me all the support, all the affection that *duty* imposes on me. I can promise you no more; our marriage of love is passed and gone, a marriage of *convenience* has succeeded to it; our feelings now must be calm, but they may be full of solicitude, of sincerity; I do not wish to praise myself, Gontran, but reflect upon all that has passed between us, and say if I have not acted——"

"Like the most generous of women. It is true, true indeed! but the remembrance of past happiness renders me so exigent, that I cannot content myself with that, which is even more than I deserve."

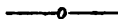
"Then have courage, Gontran, have courage; life may still have many charms for you. In a noble ambition, in constant employment, in rendering others happy, you will find a new existence opening on you, and if you feel sometimes unhappy, think how many there are more unhappy than you."

"Yes, yes Matilda, you will see, I will render myself worthy of you; from this day, as you say, I will begin a new life; you have awakened in my heart a praiseworthy ambition; I will follow your advice to the letter—for some time I have regretted remaining an indifferent spectator of this revolution; not proclaiming myself the partizan of a family to whom I owe so much; that alone was unworthy of me—oh! I thank you for having made me feel ashamed of it."

I confess, this conversation gave me some hope, I thanked God for having suggested it to me. The more I reflected on the advice I had given and the hopes with which I had inspired Gontran the more I applauded myself.

If ambition could once take root in his mind, it would spread quickly, so as to conquer the passion that occupied it for Ursula.

Gontran with his abilities and his knowledge of mankind, once mixing in politics would certainly soon attain a distinguished position.



## CHAPTER. XIII.

### THE DEPARTURE.

THE day after that conversation which had inspired me with so much hope, and in which Gontran had shewn so much noble resolution, I did not see my husband. About two o'clock the weather was fine, but cold, I sent to ask M. de Lancry if he would take an airing with me in the carriage. Blondeau brought me word that he was very much engaged, and was sorry he could not accompany me.

I fancied, that with the usual impetuosity of his character, he was already preparing for those studies which were to be of so much future advantage to him.

I went alone.

The air did me good; my wounded heart seemed to be animated with a distant hope which already cheered it.

Though I no longer felt any love for my husband, though his presence was often painful to me, on account of the cruel recollections which it brought back to me, yet I could not help anticipating the possibility of happier times.

If M. de Lancry could accomplish, by dint of exertions and his own will, to conquer his passion for Ursula, and to substitute for it a noble ambition, then I should consider him saved and restored to me.

Ambition once awakened in a man of his disposition, there would be but little room for any of his tender feelings. Perhaps then, in return for my devotion to him, the possession of my heart, might be *sufficient* for Gontran. Alas! these thoughts proved to me the weakness of my resolutions, and the instability of my impressions.

Without doubt, as I had told my husband, I no longer loved him, and yet, with the slightest hope of seeing him as he used to be, it seemed to me I should also resume towards him my old love.

I preferred thinking that my heart was lethargic, to supposing that all its emotions were dead.

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After a long airing I returned home. It was almost dark.

As I approached the Castle I was surprised to see Blondeau coming to meet me.

She made a sign to the coachman for the carriage to stop.

I was struck by the uneasy and melancholy air of that excellent woman.

"Get into the carriage," said I; "I will take you back."

"I was going to ask you to do so, madame."

Blondeau got in.

"Heavens, what is the matter," exclaimed I; "you are pale—you are agitated; certainly something extraordinary has happened."

"Pray madame, do not alarm yourself."

"But what has happened? you frighten me."

"I have come to meet you, madame, fearing that on arriving at the Castle, you would hear too suddenly——"

"Once more, speak, tell me what has happened."

"Calm yourself, madame, calm yourself; it is something which will surprise you very much, but which ought not to afflict you, if you consider it rationally—perhaps it may be even for the best; you will be more at rest."

"More at rest? Explain yourself."

"This letter, which the Viscount has given me for you, will inform you without doubt."

"A letter! where is it?"

"Here it is, madame ; but it is dark, you cannot read it."

"But what did M. de Lancry say?"

"Madame, I will tell you what has occurred. You had hardly set out, when Germain, whom Monsieur de Lancry had sent to Paris some time since, and wrote to him every day, arrived at the Castle from Paris ; he immediately asked to see his master ; he had hardly been with him five minutes——"

"Well?"

"Indeed, madame," continued Blondeau, with hesitation, and regarding me with compassion, "it may be for the best—that departure——"

"A departure!—M. de Lancry is departed," cried I, clasping my hands.

"And would to God he may never come back!" exclaimed Blondeau, impetuously, "for you will die from the troubles he brings on you, my poor mistress."

Without answering Blondeau, I rushed in to read the letter of M. de Lancry. It was as follows.

Maran, 3 o'clock.

"You will guess, without doubt, the cause of my sudden departure ; it would be useless, now, to have any dissimulation with you. You will see clearly that there are some fatalities which it is impossible to resist.

"My presence must now be insupportable to you, and yours can only remind me of faults which I neither can or will deny. Your feelings and my faults are of such a nature that we could not live together in that sort of negative intimacy, which is sufficient for some married people.

"Your regrets for the former period of our union, would take the form of reproaches, and your patient virtue would be for ever reminding me of my errors ; my disposition would be still more embittered, and therefore any attempt towards a re-union would be fatal to us both.

"I leave you in full liberty, feeling certain that you will always respect appearances. I ask the same favour from you, though my determination is quite taken, and any attempt to make me change it, would be utterly in vain.

"I think that twenty five thousand francs a year will be sufficient for you—whether you remain at Maran, as I advise you, or come to Paris, that pension will be punctually paid to you.

"Let me hear of your health, and if you have any objections to make on financial matters write to me, I will try to arrange things according to your wish.

I was deceived, as you were, by my good resolutions of yesterday ;

it was perfect weakness, I had quite lost my reason, I spoke and acted like a man without any energy, the current carries me on, I shut my eyes and abandon myself to it; whatever you may say, there are circumstances where the will is utterly powerless.

G. de L."

The sudden departure of my husband and the receipt of that letter, caused me such extreme agitation, that I felt immediately some violent internal injury; my blood froze in my veins, a horrible fear overwhelmed me, I fainted,

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To day I repeat as I did then, and as I shall always, Gontran destroyed the fruit of my womb.

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How long I remained in a state of insensibility I know not.

Blondeau never left me, night or day—she has told me since, that when I revived from my insensibility, my reason seemed gone, I burst into fits of convulsive laughter.

Afterwards I fell into a sort of stupor, during which time I never spoke a word, nor did I appear to hear any thing that was said to me.

It was two months ere I regained full possession of my senses.

When I came to myself I made Blondeau tell me all that happened.....all about the departure of my husband.....the state into which it threw me, all in short up to that terrible moment when.... But my pen stops.....my hand trembles.....oh, my child !..... my child !.....Curses on you, Gontran ! Curses on you !.....Even now, my despair vents itself in sobs.....oh, curses on him who so mercilessly destroyed the only tie that reconciled me to this life.

I often questioned myself whether the sudden departure of Gontran was the sole cause of the fatal event, or whether it was the effect of the violent grief I had experienced for some months past.

It was a long time, blushing for myself, before I could confess that unpardonable weakness—but it was true—notwithstanding his letter to Ursula—notwithstanding my own resentment, and that had assured him I loved him no longer; to my shame I confess it, I loved him still. I loved him, since it was the shock which his departure caused me, that brought on the premature death of my child. Now, that all illusion is for ever dissipated, and I can look back to the past. I can perceive that even amidst the most despairing moments of my existence, a secret hope remained; when Gontran abandoned me, I felt how much his presence had

sustained me. A terrible remorse must therefore embitter all my life, that unworthy love has lost me the life of my child ; if, as I had professed to do, I had become indifferent to a man so devoid of all principle, if I had placed all my hopes of happiness in my maternal love, I should have been able to bear this blow with calmness and dignity.

It was not so ! From the agonising shock that his departure caused me, I learnt by how many fibres my heart still clung to his.....his infamous desertion of me, however, in tearing them forcibly away destroyed, though alas too late, but for ever, my ill-fated love for him.

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## CHAPTER. XVII.

### THE WILL.

DURING my illness the following letters from Madame de Richeville had arrived at Maran.

Blondeau seeing that they were sealed with black, would not give them to me till I was out of danger, fearing their contents might cause me pain, and expose me to emotions that would be dangerous for me.

The presentiments of that kind, devoted creature were not mistaken.

Paris, two o'clock. January, 1831.

" I write you a line in haste, dear Matilda, to inform you of a very painful event.

" I have just heard that M. de Mortagne was yesterday seriously wounded in a duel. They say (but I cannot believe it), that our unfortunate friend, whose honourable character you are fully aware of, was the aggressor.

" The surgeons cannot yet give any hopes ; they will dress his wounds this evening. I know not why, but I cannot help dreading that this duel has been in consequence of some deep laid plot.

" I went instantly myself to endeavour to obtain some information. Sitting back in my carriage, I waited at the door of the house, which M. de Mortagne, as you know, alone inhabits, till my servant came back to me. Two men, very tall, well dressed, but of vulgar appearance, came without doubt to inquire a'so after him. Before they went in, they made some ridiculous grimaces, as if to apologise for the one going before the other, which surprised me. After remaining about a minute in the house they

came out, and stood for an instant before the door, looking about them ; then one of the men, the tallest, (I shall never forget his countenance, so expressive of every bad feeling, and his small, sharp, grey eyes), said to the other, with a ferocious laugh :

“ ‘ *When I told you that a bullet in the arm was as good as a bullet in the brain, I had fully intended taking aim at the head, but I, who should not miss a fly at forty paces, I felt my eye sink under the gaze of that man—I never saw such a look as he has ; it is what disconcerted me in my aim.*’

“ ‘ *There is no harm done if the blow was effectual,*’ replied the other man in a strong, foreign accent, ‘ *in that case,*’ continued he, ‘ *what is promised must be fulfilled.....there is only his word.....and.....*

“ I heard no more, the two men went away, but I cannot tell you what uneasiness I felt. Who are those men ? what connection could such beings have with M. de Mortagne, what could their words signify : ‘ *What is promised, must be fulfilled ! there is only his word...if the blow was effectual,* that is to say, without doubt, if it was mortal ! what mystery can this be ?’

8 o'clock in the evening.

“ M. de Mortagne is in the same state.....they have imposed the most perfect silence on him. I begged M. de Saint Pierre, who was one of his seconds, to come to me, I wished to tell him of the conversation I heard between those two men ; he was as much struck as I was by those strange expressions ; the one with grey eyes was the adversary of M. de Mortagne. These are the details that M. de Saint Pierre gave me of this duel :

“ M. de Mortagne came to him Thursday evening to tell him that he had had a violent quarrel with a man with whom he was not acquainted, but who he had often met at the Café de Paris, where he constantly dined.

“ That man and his companion always contrived to place themselves at a table near his, whenever they could do so. When they were established there, and so as to be within hearing of M. de Mortagne, they begun speaking of the Emperor in the most gross and insulting terms. You know, my dear Matilda, the sort of idolatry that M. de Mortagne entertains for Napoleon, you may imagine with what impatience he bore these remarks, which wounded him in the object of his warmest sympathy. On Friday last, he went to dine there, as usual ; he was hardly seated before these two strangers arrived ; the same scene recommenced ; the same conversation was continued. Our unfortunate friend felt it more difficult to restrain himself, as he thought he perceived the two men exchange signs of intelligence together, when they looked at him ; however, he exercised sufficient control over himself to

get up and go away without saying a word, having, in fact, no proof of aggression—those two men had a perfect right to canvass their opinions with each other, and they were not addressed to him. When he left the dinner, M. de Mortagne went to the Comédie Française; there were very few people there; he took a stall; in a few minutes the two strangers came and placed themselves next to him, and renewed the conversation just where it had been left off. M. de Mortagne could not help perceiving a desire to irritate him, in the strange perseverance with which they followed him; he lost patience, unfortunately his impetuous temper got the better of him, and he said to the man with grey eyes, that none but a blackguard would speak in such terms of the Emperor. The man instead of answering M. de Mortagne redoubled his abuse of Napoleon; always addressing himself to his companion. Our unfortunate friend, whom this *sang froid* excited to the greatest pitch, forgot himself so far as to seize violently hold of the arm of the stranger, and to ask him if he had not heard what he said.

"The man immediately replied, 'you have called me a blackguard, you have laid hands on me, I did not address a single word to you, you are the aggressor, you owe me satisfaction; to-morrow morning my second shall call upon you;' and he gave his card to M. de Mortagne. The name on that card was *Le Capitaine Le Blanc*. The same evening M. de Mortagne went to M. de Saint Pierre, confessed to him that he had been in the wrong, but that he could not restrain himself when he heard the insults that were levelled against a man whom he admires more than any other in the world, he begged M. de Saint Pierre to see the second of *Le Capitaine le Blanc*, adding that he was ready to give him satisfaction the next morning, at eight o'clock, the second of Captain le Blanc, an Italian who bore the title of Chevalier Peretti, came to M. de Saint Pierre, and claimed the choice of arms for Captain Le Blanc who wished to fight with pistols, and at twenty paces, and to fire the first, as he was the insulted one. M. de Saint Pierre wishing to equalise the chances of the duel proposed that both combatants should fire at the same moment, but the second of Captain le Blanc would not consent, unfortunately M. de Mortagne having been the aggressor without any provocation. M. de Saint Pierre was obliged to accede to their terms.

"When M. de Mortagne heard the result of this interview, he appeared thoughtful, and *pre-occupé*; before the duel took place he gave M. de Saint Pierre a key, begging him to send the papers which he would find in that cupboard, according to their address.

M. de Saint Pierre knowing the courage of M. de Mortagne who had given brilliant examples of it in similar circumstances, attri-

buted to some kind of presentiment the depression that he shewed previous to the combat. Our friend regretted, very often, having allowed himself to become so exasperated as to insult that man, as if the memory of the emperor was not sufficient to right itself. Many times he repeated : " It would have been hardly justifiable if my life belonged to *myself alone* ; but at such a moment as this, to conduct myself as I have done, is more than *folly*, it is almost *crime*."

"At twelve o'clock M. de Mortagne and his two seconds arrived at the *Bois de Ville-D'Avray*. Everything was arranged, as it had been proposed.

"The two adversaries placed themselves at twenty paces from each other ; M. de Mortagne drew himself up to his full height, and taking his pistol in his right hand, he crossed his arms on his breast ; and fixed so penetrating and piercing a look on the Captain le Blanc, that for a moment he cast down his eyes, and M. de Saint Pierre distinctly saw him tremble ; however his pistol went off, alas, it was fatal enough. M. de Mortagne sprang up then fell on his knees, putting his right hand to his left side, then he fell, exclaiming "my poor child!" you see, he thought of you, Matilda? His seconds received him almost dying in their arms, the ball had penetrated the chest ; they removed him with the greatest care to Paris, and since yesterday, though very dangerous, his case is not wholly despaired of. This my dear Matilda is the recital that I have heard from M. de Saint Pierre. From the mysterious expressions that dropped from the adversaries of M. de Mortagne, M. de Saint Pierre agrees with me that these two men had resolved to irritate M. de Mortagne beyond his powers of endurance until, by an imprudent assault, he put himself in the power of two assassins, one of whom appeared but too certain of his aim.

"But who can be the mysterious originator of this atrocious vengeance, no doubt those villains did not act for themselves, they are only the instruments of some horrible machination.....I have this moment received a message from M. de Mortagne, he feels better ; he says he has things of the utmost importance to communicate to me ; I shall not fail attending to that sad and pious duty ; I leave you ; soon to resume, my dear child."

Paris, Eleven o'clock in the evening.

"I am come from our friend—let us thank God and pray for him!—there is still some hope—he will live!—oh he will live for the happiness of his friends, and the chastisement of his enemies, for what I have heard from him proves to me that there has been a horrible plot. What an abyss of infamy!—but to speak of you now—his first exclamation was, 'Matilda!' his first words were to entreat me to tell you that serious duties had absorbed all his time, so as to prevent his devoting a few days to you ; since that scene in the

solitary old house, (he has confided to me all the details of that horrible night, you will know soon why).

"He received the letter that you wrote him on the subject of your husband's extravagance; according to his usual custom he wished to answer it by re-assuring you, and giving you good advice, but he was obliged to have many consultations with men of business, and it was only the day before yesterday and then it was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to procure a copy of your marriage-settlements. Alas! my poor child, you have been made the victim of a most perfidious and well organised plot.....you have it not in your power to dispose of any thing.....your husband can clutch hold of everything and leave nothing but beggary to *her* who has so generously enriched him.

"But let Matilda, be easy," said M. de Mortagne; "whatever happens, whether I live or die, her future welfare and that of her child are cared for, and will be secured beyond the power of her husband to dissipate."

"I told him everything, my unhappy friend! Your just causes for jealousy, and your husband's baseness—he thinks there is but one means possible for emancipating you from such tyranny. I hardly like to write the word—for I know your tender blindness on that point—however, the only means he can suggest is a *separation*!—and you have not been married a year, unhappy child!

"Listen to your friend—Listen to me—reflect upon it—habituate yourself to that thought—do not let it frighten you—doubtless isolation is painful, but it is better than every moment spent in grief and fear.

"If, as I doubt not, God preserves M. de Mortagne he will go to you himself; and, before your husband, will give you the same advice that I have now done.

"And now we come to the suspicions which the words I overheard have created in him. Do you guess, whom he accuses, though with all the candour of a true and loyal character? It is the demon who planned your destruction, M. Lugarto! It was to make me understand the cause of his rage against him, that he related to me the scene in that solitary house, and the threats of vengeance which he professed when he left it—he has kept his word but too well! these persons, hired and instructed by him, were spies on M. de Mortagne and following the execrable directions of their master they exasperated our unhappy friend, by insulting, before him, the memory of the man whom he revered. Once the aggressor, M. de Mortagne had no other choice but to bare his breast to the hired assassins of M. Lugarto.

"Here this letter of Mde Richeville was interrupted, a note accompanying a large packet sealed with black, was written in a trembling hand by Mde Richeville.

One o'clock in the morning,

"I have hardly strength to write these terrible words.....*He is dead*—...suffocation came on and carried him off; that is not all. I fear I shall go mad with terror. Hardly had that melancholy intelligence been announced to me when a stranger brought a box for me. Emma opened it, in my presence—what did I see?..... A nosegay of those bright red flowers, the colour of blood, like those you wore in your hair last year at a morning fête, and which had been sent you by M. de Lugarto—that demon in a human form; the nosegay was tied with black ribbon—do you understand that horrible allegory? Is it not at the same time announcing whose hand it is that has already struck us, and the future vengeance which it threatens us. If it is so—Oh my God, mercy, mercy for my child?—strike me, but spare her. Matilda, be on your guard, an evil spirit is hovering about us; our friend is perhaps only his first victim—adieu! I have not strength to add a thousand expressions of tenderness and despair.

VERNEUIL DE RICHEVILLE.

A sealed packet, addressed to me, accompanied this letter.

It contained the last will of M. de Mortagne—the gift that he made to me, of all his property—and it revealed to me a sacred mystery, which must remain for ever buried in my heart.

I need not say my grief was profound—the only hand that would have been stretched forth to save me on the brink of the abyss—was stiffened in death.

Every support seemed taken from me at once—a fatality seemed to weigh upon me.

One day that I found myself alone—my heart desolate and void—my soul full of bitterness and hatred.

In my impious rebellion to the fate that God had awarded me, doubtless to prove me, tired of being the victim, I began to think of returning evil for evil.

Can you ever forgive me, oh my God?

"May my faults fall on the head of the man who plunged me into such a stormy and despairing life."

"No, I have no pity—no pity for him—he has cast me down from Heaven to Hell, he has caused me to lose my only hope."

"Hatred—hatred for ever towards *Him who killed my child*.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE LETTER.

I begin with diffidence the recital of this new period of my life.

In retracing the events which succeeded each other from my childhood to my marriage; and since my marriage, to the moment when M. de Lancry so cruelly deserted me to join Ursula at Paris, I could dwell without fear on all my proceedings, on all the impressions that they awakened, I had nothing to conceal, nothing to disguise from myself. Sincerity was easy to me.

I had nothing to reproach myself with, but the exaggeration of some generous qualities; I said to M. de Lancry that I knew myself that my misfortunes would gain no sympathy even if they were known in the world, as I had failed in energy and dignity in my conduct towards him. I had always shewn myself blindly submissive or stupidly resigned; I had only been able to weep and to suffer--and suffering is more a virtue, than tears are a language. To suffer in a noble cause, is elevating and grand; humbly to endure the contempt and indignities of an unworthy object is a shameful weakness which may perhaps excite a frugal pity, but never a touching interest.

That discovery was a terrible blow to me; I found that after all I had suffered I had hardly acquired the right to be pitied; reflection and experience proved to me that in the eyes of the world, or rather in that of most men, Ursula, with her vices and seductions, would please, while I could hope for nothing more than a disdainful pity; at least I had the consoling recollection of never having failed in my duties, and I mingled with that conviction a sort of bitter disdain for the opinion of the world and the follies of my husband.

... ..  
I cannot describe my sensations when, after my long illness, I found myself alone, weeping for my child dead before its birth.

The melancholy end of M. de Mortagne, my only support, rendered my isolation still more painful. While the winter lasted, I suffered with calm resignation; but in the spring, the first fine weather, the sight of the first flowers caused me feelings full of bitterness; the dismal winter was at least in accordance with my own desolation; but when nature appeared in all its renovated splendour, when everything burst into fresh life, when I felt the soft air perfumed by the first blossoms, when I heard the joyous songs of the birds in the foliage, my despair increased.

The aspect of nature, so peaceful and so smiling was unbearable to me; I felt all power of loving and experiencing happiness dead

within me. I was often subject to fits of despair and rage when I considered that had my child lived ; my life might have been as bright as ever, for I had anticipated treasures of consolation in the exercise of maternal love ; however contemptuous, however cruel, however unworthy the conduct of M. de Lancry might have been towards me, it could not have affected me amidst the heavenly felicity in which I should have sheltered myself.

Notwithstanding the odious proceedings of my husband towards me ; I never could understand that treachery could authorise or excuse treachery. I thought this not from any feeling of respect to M. de Lancry, but from respect for myself.

I felt that according to worldly principles, I had perhaps every right to seek to revenge myself by indulging in a guilty love ; but besides the idea, that such revenge would be most degrading to me, I really believed the sources of tender affection to be entirely effaced from my heart.

I was sometimes alarmed at the paroxysms of rage which came over me, the recollection of Ursula was horrible to me ; sometimes it occasioned in my soul the most extravagant desire of revenge.

This is one of the strange fatalities of our condition. A man can vent his fury on his enemy, can provoke him, can kill him, in the face of the world, but a woman, betrayed by another woman, her tenderest affections wounded by her, can do nothing but weep in silence ! Strange destiny ! we who suffer so much from love, we may not revenge ourselves in any open manner ; we can only show contempt ! contempt do I say ? what would Ursula care for my contempt, who had already braved that of the world.

To these violent conflicts succeeded a sad indifference—so my life passed on.

Prayer, and acts of charity brought with them, I confess with shame, but little comfort to me ; the good that I was able to do, was a satisfaction to my heart, but could not fill the void there was in it.

Often, my poor Blondeau advised me to try change of scene, to travel, I had neither the wish, nor the strength to do so ; everything around me brought to my mind the most bitter and painful recollections, and I remained at Maran, enervated and desponding.

I led the life of a recluse ; all the attendants of M. de Lancry had followed him, my household was composed of Blondeau, two other women, and an old valet-de-chambre, who had been in M. de Mortagne's service.

I walked a great deal in order to be overcome by fatigue ; when I came home I placed myself mechanically at my embroidery frame ; it was impossible for me to attempt to occupy myself with music ; I was in such a nervous state, that the sound of the piano made me burst into tears.

Madame de Richeville wrote to me very often ; when she found that my husband had rejoined Ursula at Paris, she proposed to me to come and visit me at Maran, though it would cost her much to separate herself from Emma, and to leave her at Sacre Cœur, where she was finishing her education ; I thanked that excellent friend, but I begged her not to quit her daughter, and also in future, never to mention M. de Lancry or Ursula to me. I, was determined to know nothing of their proceedings.

The letters of Madame de Richeville were full of tenderness and goodness, understanding and respecting my grief. She nevertheless pressed me to come to her at Paris, but I had an invincible objection to return to the world.

I knew by my men of business that M. de Lancry was ruining me ; he had full power over me. By our marriage, we had all things in common ; and therefore he could legally dissipate all my fortune with impunity.

I confess that pecuniary matters were indifferent enough to me ; the allowance that he made me sufficed to my wants ; and besides Madame de Richeville had written to me that M. de Mortagne, dying so suddenly, had not had time to make arrangements to prevent the property he left me being touched by my husband, but that he had confided to her care a considerable sum, destined for the support of myself and child, in case M. de Lancry was completely ruined. Alas ! my child was no more—of what consequence could the future be to me.

More than two years had slipped away in that manner with the rapidity that time so monotonously spent generally does.

At the end of that period I no longer suffered ; I felt nothing, neither joy, nor grief. Perhaps I should have remained still longer in that state of apathy, if the following letter from Madame de Richeville had not convinced me of the absolute necessity of returning to Paris.

Paris, 20th. October, 1834.

"I am obliged, my dear Matilda, notwithstanding your prohibition, to mention M. de Lancry. Yesterday, one of my friends learnt by accident that your husband was going to sell your estate at Maran. The person who wished to buy it would not give more than thirty thousand francs. I know how much you are attached to that place, because it belonged to your mother ; I therefore thought I should do right, (after consulting M. de Rochegune, who arrived here a month since) in sending my lawyer to M. de Lancry, and purchasing Maran at a higher price than was already offered for it. Your husband agreed to it ; the contract for the sale is all ready, but your presence in Paris is indispensable.

" Pardon these tiresome details of business, but you must feel, my

dear child, of what importance they are to you, and, I am happy that I have had the opportunity of saving you some vexation and fresh causes for regret.

"A journey to Paris is now unavoidable; it will be the means perhaps of rousing you from the lethargy in which you are plunged. My dear child! your letters distress me to the greatest degree. Is your grief quite incurable? ought you to give yourself up to such despairing apathy? are the consolations of friendship, as nothing to you? why will you so obstinately persist in cherishing your own gloomy thoughts?

"I can understand, better than any one else, your dislike to the world; but is there not a medium between absolute solitude, and the gaieties of the world? I dare not speak to you of my own happiness, and quote my life as an example, that is to be found in an existence shared in and embellished by sincere friendship..... My Emma is with me, and therefore you will say to me, and with reason, that I ought to be content with my condition, whatever it may be.

"It appears to me however that the solitude in which you live, can only serve to embitter the noble qualities of your heart, if anything can do so, therefore I repeat again come, pray come to us!—

"Since Emma's education is finished, and I have left *Sacré Cœur*, I have collected around me a charming society of women rather older than yourself, for I have frankly acknowledged that I consider myself an *old woman*, a confession, that has disarmed those, who still feared I might have entered into competition with them; I am at home every evening; we often speak of you; the proceedings of your husband and that *horrible woman* are so scandalous; your resignation is so praiseworthy, so courageous, that there is but one voice, that of pity and admiration for you.

"The revolution has upset all our society; there is now nothing but small parties; no great houses are thrown open. It is rather from ill-will to the government, which they care but little about, than from any difficulty in bringing together the adverse parties.

"The ambassadors of Sardinia and of Austria are the only circles where you meet a *re-union* of the fragments of our old society.

"Do not be surprised, my dear child, at my entering into these details which may appear trifling, in comparison to the important decision that I wish to induce you to make.

"If society was constituted as it was four years ago. If there was still a court, I could enter into your feelings of repugnance to re-entering it—women of your disposition blush for those who have injured them. the scandalous conduct of M. de Lancry, would have made you feel that seclusion was your duty; according to your own words, which you vote to me: "A woman either suffers from being abandoned by her husband; or she does *not* suffer; in either of those two alternatives, it is equally incumbent on her not to expose

to the eyes of the world either her indifference or her grief"—but once more my dear child, I do not propose to you to enter *into the world*; the society I collect around me, all of whom wish so much to see you, consists of not more than fifteen or twenty persons, and they are all either my relations, or most intimate friends. Let me describe them to you; it shall be my last argument in favor of your coming to me. "You will meet, almost every evening, the excellent Prince D'Hericourt and his wife. They have passed together a long life of the most tender affection and happiness, which no clouds have ever obscured. The first revolution ruined them, the last robbed them of what belonged to their rank; having thus become poor, they have supported their misfortunes with such noble courage, that they are as much respected in their reverse, as they were in their prosperity.

"I assure you, Matilda, that the sight of those old people, whose serenity is so great; would calm you, and inspire you with courage to bear your grief with fortitude.

"Two days since I went to see the Princess in the morning, she and her husband occupy a small house near the barrier *de Monceaux*; the retirement of the place, the enjoyment of a small garden, and above all the lowness of the rent, have induced them to fix there; I cannot tell you with what veneration I entered their abode.

"Nothing could be more simple than their furniture, but fine old family portraits, and some royal presents given to the Prince during the time he was Ambassador, gave to that habitation an appearance of grandeur of bygone days, which brought the tears into my eyes.

"I thought, with bitterness, that the Prince and Princess, accustomed to grandeur, suffered perhaps cruel privations at their age, though I had never heard from them a complaint, or even a bitter word against their fate.

"I could not help testifying my admiration to the Princess, she answered me with the most touching simplicity:

"My dear Amelie, the secret of what you call our courageous resignation, is a very simple one; we compare ourselves to many more unfortunate than we are. We remember that we might have been separated during our time of trials; we think above all of our poor King and his children, and we thank God for having spared us so much grief that he might have inflicted on us.

"Matilda, I know how much interest and sympathy your case deserves; I do not ask you to compare your misfortunes with theirs, or to imitate such stoical courage, but I say once again, come, pray come among us; it is almost a consolation to have such people to love; and besides, my dear child, when, after your solitary day, you lay down to sleep, what consoling reflections can you have? Now,

if on the contrary, you had witnessed so interesting a scene as I have described to you, would you not have felt less unhappy ! why should it not be with an illness of the soul, the same thing, as with an illness of the body ; if a pure and healthy air can cure the one, why should not the reciprocity of elevated and generous feelings be of service to the other ?

" I know that you are good and charitable ; but your modesty prevents your dwelling with complacency on the good you do, therefore your charity does not lessen your grief.

" Once more, come among us, we will cause you some little distraction, for you will find also with me the amiable and witty Countess A. de Semur, my cousin ; her understanding is fine, supple, and brilliant, and above all she is inexorable to everything that is low, unworthy, or treacherous ; she loves extremes, they say, to excess ; do you know why ? It is in order to exalt all that is generous and elevated, in the opinion of every one ; and also to immolate, without pity, everything that she thinks ridiculous or wicked.

" Do you remember, at your first introduction into the world, at a morning fête at the Austrian Ambassador's, remarking a stranger of incomparable beauty, Lady Flora Fitz Allan ? she has not forgotten you ; I see her very often and she constantly speaks of you to me ; that day she was admiring the expression of candour and *naïveté* of your charming countenance, when they told her that you had the most caustic and malicious disposition possible. (It was, as you have since told me, one of the first calumnies Mlle. de Maran invented about you), Lady Flora remained stupified with astonishment, almost with fear ; she told me to think that such a countenance could only be a mask to hide such bad qualities. You may be sure I soon undeceived her. She thanked me with much warmth, it would have been so painful to her, she said, to think that the expression of your countenance, could have been so false a one, you will be charmed with Lady Flora. As to Lord Fitz Allan he is a perfect specimen of the English nobleman ; full of honor and worth.

" You must have met sometimes the Marquise de Lingny, and her daughter the Duchess of Grandval ; if not, to make them known to you, you must image the most perfect grace, joined to an exquisite distinction of manner, and a degree of native elegance, if I may use the term, for in that family, it appears to be the hereditary quality of the women, it is their "*loi salique*."

" Among the men, you will often meet at my house, M. the Ambassador of \* \* \* \* \* one of my best and oldest friends, a man of courtly manners, rare courage, excellent sense, good judgment, and who is besides simple and good. I beg you to believe, my dear child, that I receive none but people of solid worth, but

as you know how much I like contrasts, I must introduce to you *la fleur des pois* of the present time, my nephew, Gaston de Senneville. It is impossible to be better looking, more full of grace, more perfectly well brought up, and yet more *inoffensive*, not to say more *insignificant*.

"He is one of those charming young men who is always at the head of all the admirers of a woman who is the fashion. As I am no longer a woman of fashion, I was rather surprised to see him come so often to me ; he has confessed to me that he likes me as the best relation he has in the world, and also that the habits he acquires with me, give a consistency to his character, and a serious turn to it, which his age would not have permitted him to hope for, and which is of great service to him. He has the good taste not to be in the least an exclusive, and to shew his pretty face and good manners everywhere. I need not therefore add that he joins in the *nouvelle cour*, and it is from him we have an account of what goes on there. He says there are some charming women, though rather oddly brought up, and men that are beyond his description. His gossip amuses us very much ; besides it is desirable to have some tie, in every family, with the present government be it what it may.

"But while I am dwelling on all this I have not yet mentioned to you our best friend, who is quite the soul of our *ré-unions* ; I told you that M. de Rohegune was come back, without giving you any further details ; I will now explain that omission. I should never have recognised him so much has the Eastern sun tanned him. After having fought with the Greeks against the Turks ; he went, out of curiosity, to join the war of the Circassians with the Russians. It is impossible to relate with a greater charm than he does, all his campaigns, and the wonders he has seen ; he has acquired, what in my opinion was wanting before, assurance and firmness, which shews off in its right colours his noble character, which was before too timid and too reserved.

The death of M. de Mortagne has been, as you may imagine, a sad blow to him ; we often speak of that most excellent friend. M. de Rohegune feels the most profound and sincere friendship for you, he is a favourite with every one, for his goodness, his fine judgment, and devoted loyalty. He is really a man of most extraordinary moral courage ; no consideration can even induce him to lessen the frankness of his character ; he says and does things, that no one else would say and do. The Countess de Semur said of him with much justice : *it is impossible to be a more boldly honest man.*" He often speaks in the house of peers, his speeches are decisive and appropriate, sparing neither friends nor enemies when it is a question of some of those great principles which he values more than any thing else, though young he is much considered, for his influence equals his independence.

"Now my task is nearly completed ; my dear Matilda, I have endeavoured to depict to you the people amongst whom you will live if you like, and who are expecting you, not to begin loving you, but to tell you how much they have loved you for some time past.

"Believe me, my dear Matilda, in proportion as the world is wicked and scandalous in general, a chosen circle is benevolent and devoted to the persons that compose it.

"Dear child, I have told you, I have committed faults. I confess them ; but the world, not content with reproaching me with them, exaggerated them into the most odious calumnies. It required all the influence of my name, my family, my connections, my fortune and my character, to bear up against such unbounded malice ; well ! ever since I have retired from that busy world, since years, misfortunes, reason, and religion, have given me solidity of principles, and a steadiness of conduct, that I did not possess before, I have found nothing but indulgence, sympathy, and interest.

"I need not tell you, after having named to you the persons whom I am in the habit, of constantly associating with, that they are composed of the *élite* of the best society, and their intimacy with me, absolves me, if I may so use the term, from any stigma of my former faults. The Prince and the Princess D'Hericourt, among others, are persons, whose whole lives have been so pure, whose characters stand so high, that on their blame, or their praise, depends the reception you meet with, in the world. The Prince D'Hericourt in a word is the representative of all that is honourable, delicate, courageous, and elevated ; though he lives so retired, to the praise of society be it spoken, he has even more influence in it, since the misfortunes which he has so nobly borne, than he had before ; you must feel how proud and happy I am, in the attachment of that venerable couple.

"And then, shall I add, what fills my heart with joy and gratitude, it is that Emma is loved as she deserves to be.

"Perhaps they know the secret of her birth, though she passes for an orphan that I have taken charge of ; the delicate reserve which they maintain on that subject is at any rate, a proof of most amiable toleration. You know how handsome she was—my Emma—well, if maternal love does not blind me, she is still handsomer ; then the education that, under my own eyes, she has received at *Sacre Cœur* has developed all the good dispositions which shewed themselves in her. Two or three times a week I keep her to spend the evening with me, all my friends are enchanted with her, but you will see—

"You will see ? Alas *will* you see Matilda ? will you renounce that solitary and desolate life, in which you are consuming your best years ? In truth my dear child they will say that your melan-

choly retreat is an expiation.....an expiation. ....my God.....for the harm that has been done you ; without doubt.

"But I re-assure myself—in thinking of the strong reasons which exist to induce you to come back to Paris, it would be folly for you to hesitate : even your love for Maran, must urge you to take means to secure it to yourself.

"I cannot hope that the last inducement that I have to offer you, will be sufficient to decide your movements, but at least I will try.

"You know that I inhabit now a house in the *Rue de Lille* ; at the bottom of the garden there is a charming pavilion which was occupied by the Dowager Marchioness de Montal ; she has quitted it, it is all ready, will you take it ? the garden is large, you will be completely retired when you wish it, in your pavilion, if you desire to see no one, you can see no one, but at least Emma and I, we shall be near, and believe me my dear child, it is always a consolation to have those with hearts devoted to you, near you.

"Matilda, reflect well, upon all I have said to you. I can imagine your repugnance to return to Paris ; to reside there alone, at your age, and in your position is impossible ; on the other hand you cannot think of going to your aunt's, as your cousin lives with her. What I propose to you therefore, satisfies all scruples as to propriety, and yet leaves you all at full liberty.

"I can be an excellent chaperone for you, thanks to such a close approximation of habitations.

"One word more, Matilda, I should never have proposed to you to rejoin me, if I had not completely established my position in the world, and could not offer you both help and protection. If I did not feel that I was not raised above all calumny, I should never have ventured to offer, to perform towards you a task, that I consider as maternal—you understand me do you not, dear child ?—this explanation ought not to surprise you, I have made others to you, more wounding to my vanity.

"Believe me then, if I say, come to me ; that you can come with confidence and security.

"Emma is this moment come in : she begs me to remember her to you ; to tell you that she has often thought of you, and that without knowing you much *she loves you as much as you love me.*

"These are her own words ; they are too acceptable to my heart for me to fail to repeat them ; and I must add, come, come—you are as much loved, as you are impatiently expected.

A thousand tender *souvenirs.*

Verneuil de Richeville.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

The receipt of that letter, produced a decided effect on me—as far as concerned the acquisition of Maran, Mme. de Richeville only resumed the negotiation, that she had with me, two years before ; but the tears came into my eyes on reaching the last part of her letter in which she dwelt on her change of conduct and consequent reputation in the world, in order to convince me that she was worthy of fulfilling the maternal task she offered towards me ; even had not my journey to Paris been necessary on other accounts, I think I should have accepted Mme. de Richeville's offers, expressly to avoid wounding her by a refusal, which she might have construed unfavourably towards herself.

I confess also that the fascinating picture of the intimacy in which she lived, with persons whom I had always heard praised, both for their wit and high character, was not without its due weight in the resolution I took of beginning a new course of life ; though I felt some regrets in leaving the place where I had suffered so much.

No fears of meeting my husband or Ursula at Paris had anything to do with my choice of the solitary life I had led, I felt towards M. de Lancry an indifference founded on contempt ; for my cousin a profound aversion ; but I possessed sufficient self dignity to be certain, that if I encountered them, notwithstanding their effrontery, I should not shew any signs of emotion.

From the moment that my husband left me, I looked upon myself as separated from him, for ever ; if not by law, at least, in fact ; a position so embarrassing for a very young woman, and my repugnance to living alone in Paris had contributed to prolong my sojourn at Maran, but Mme. de Richeville by her proposal to me to live almost with her obviated all my scruples.

I told Bloudeau, we should quit Maran ; “ to go and live at Paris, near the Duchess,” she cried with joy and began making preparations for our journey immediately, lest I should change my mind.

I quitted Maran the end of the autumn.

I was obliged to pass by Rouvray ; I did not know if I should stop there or not, in order to see Mme. Sécherin ; I had had no news of her or her son since the fatal day when she came to Maran, to announce to Ursula that her son, indignant at her conduct, was determined to be separated from her for ever.

I dreaded this visit ; it would open afresh, both with me and these unhappy people, the wounds that were beginning to heal—on

the other hand, I did not like to appear indifferent to the misfortunes of that man who was so good and so honest. In the midst of my uncertainty I arrived almost in sight of the manufactory of M. Sécherin; I ordered the postillions to go at a foot's pace wishing to give myself a few more minutes for further consideration, when suddenly M. Sécherin made his appearance, coming out from a narrow lane which turned into the high road.

He saw me, and stopt, he looked at me some moments with a haggard air then, hiding his face in his hands, he quickly regained the road he came from.

M. Sécherin was cruelly altered; he had recognised me, so that I could not avoid going to see his mother; I went up to the house, Blondeau waited for me in the carriage at the bottom of the avenue of Linden trees, where I had formerly encountered Ursula! (I went on alone) I was painfully struck by the state in which I found the garden which used to be so carefully tended—weeds were growing over the walks; the old trees which used to be clipped, had grown wild, and hid the view of the Loire, and its smiling banks; there was no vestige of any flowers in the deserted flower beds; the dead leaves were crushed by my foot-steps, and the drizzling rain of an autumn morning threw a veil of sadness over this scene, already so melancholy.

At the bottom of the shrubbery where I had overheard the first vows of Gontran to Ursula, I saw the group of figures in stone half destroyed. At the hall door I found one of the two servants whom I had already seen at Rouvray; she told me that Mme. Sécherin was in the drawing room. I passed through the anti-room and the dining room; it was bitterly cold; they bore marks of the neglect and desolation, that reigned all around, everything seemed to share in it; what a change in the habits of Mme. Sécherin, whom I had always seen so attentive to domestic matters, and so particular in every minutie relative to the neatness of her house. The doors were open, my foot-steps made but little sound, and I was in the drawing-room before Mme. Sécherin heard me. She was seated at her spinning wheel, and wore, as usual, a black gown and white head dress, her old grey parrot, stiffened by the cold, was asleep on his perch.

In comparing the animation and the gaiety that the presence of a young and beautiful woman had for some time brought into that house, I shuddered. If M. Sécherin still cherished the memory of Ursula, if, notwithstanding the irreparable faults of his wife, he compared the past with the present, his life must indeed be a cruel one. My heart beat so violently, that I remained immovable at the door of the drawing-room.

Examining more attentively the pale and stern countenance of Madame Sécherin, I was astonished to perceive the innumerable

wrinkles that grief had marked on her features, at each turn the measured movement of her wheel became less and less, like the pendulum of a clock which is gradually stopping. She laid her head upon her breast; her eyes seemed fixed, without seeing; a tear, so rare a thing to see in an old person, trembled on her eyelid, suddenly she made an effort, as if to rouse herself from painful reflections, and began to turn her wheel with agitated haste.

In order not to remain any longer, unperceived, I made a noise with the lock of the door. Madame Sécherin raised her head, saw me; pushed the wheel away from her with her foot, and opened her arms to embrace me without saying a word.

I kissed her venerable hands, and seated myself next to her.

After the silence of a few minutes, she exclaimed with energy,

"Oh! I am very unhappy, the most miserable of beings! he does not know it.

"I have just seen him," said I, "he appeared to me much altered.

"My poor child he could hardly be recognised.....grief is killing him.....he still thinks of that infamous creature;" said she with an air almost ferocious—

Then she added with bitterness.

"She has however never done him anything but harm.....while I, I, oh my God how I have always loved my son, and yet he thinks still of her.....he thinks more of her than he does of me, repeated she.

"I hope that you are mistaken, said I, without doubt my cousin is more absorbed by the pain of having been deceived, than by the remembrance of.....

Do not pronounce that detested name? cried she interrupting me with violence, do not for pity's sake pronounce it. .... you wish to console me, but I am not to be deceived. No, no, it is not indignation that my son feels—indignation is violent, it vents itself; it tries to find out those with whom it can curse the object which causes it, and then indignation is followed by contempt, and afterwards by forgetfulness—well then, my unhappy son has forgotten nothing—oh he has forgotten nothing."

"Wait, wait a little time longer, my cousin will soon feel contempt, which will be followed by forgetfulness: Believe me if he is so profoundly grieved, it is because, to a generous mind, contempt is painful." Mme. Sécherin bowed her head sadly, and said:

"Alas! you are mistaken, would to heaven he could feel contempt for her! But I have found it out."

"What do you mean?"

"The truth—I have found it out, I tell you; he is ashamed of it, so he shuns me—he keeps to himself; during the first violence of his grief, I could understand that my son might wish to be alone. I I persuaded myself that from consideration towards me he would

not let me see how much he suffered, for you can have no idea what his grief was.

"He has suffered very much then?"

"Suffered much! Why I have seen him for days together, do you hear? for days and nights together thrown on his bed, weeping without cessation; the only interruption to his tears and sobs being fits of rage that bordered on madness, during which his cries, his groans of agony and despair were only smothered when, in his fury, he tore the sheets with his teeth. I see him now, my God, with his arms extended, his hands clasped—not knowing my voice; and in his delirium calling on his wife—calling on that woman; while he paid no attention to me—I who was there—weeping—praying, oh! my God! what nights I have passed in that manner, kneeling at his bed-side, covered with his tears and my own—fearing that he would lose his reason in those fits of rage; with what agonising anxiety I waited till he should recognise me—then, said the unhappy mother putting her handkerchief to her eyes! then; as he is by nature as good and gentle as a child, when he came to himself, he embraced me, he begged my pardon for having distressed me, for not having been able to conquer his grief. Alas! at those times I did not despair, if he sometimes answered me with impatience, and ill humour when I reproached him for such depression; I said to myself, time will bring him round. I did everything that I could to console, to calm, and to amuse him, but I did not succeed; I got, from the neighbouring town, the most interesting books; notwithstanding the weakness of my sight, I read them to him—he did not listen to them; I ordered whatever I thought he would like to eat—he would touch nothing, I wished to induce his friends to come and visit him, he received them so ill, that they dared not come again. Notwithstanding my age, I proposed to him to travel with him; he refused me; though this house is sacred to me and I wished to end my days in it as my husband did, fearing that it might continually remind him of painful contrasts I suggested to him, to move to another; but of what use was all this? he has refused me, constantly refused me, as he does everything his mother proposes to him, added she, with bitterness." There was such profound sorrow in these touching complaints. I foresaw for M<sup>me</sup>. Sécherin so wretched a life, when I thought of the insurmountable grief of her son, that I could only take the hand of that unhappy mother in mine; and express by a look my sympathy.

"I resolved to have patience, continued she; I said to myself; the grief caused by the loss of that horrible woman cannot last. I prayed to God to give him His grace, and to restore him to me—I put up masses to his patron saint—alas! it was all useless—all—the more I tried the more I was convinced that I was no longer anything to him—no longer anything to my son continued she in a voice

interrupted by sobs; but I dared not notice it to him, he was already so miserable; I was content to wait; sometimes, to try to please me, he assumed an air less sad—once the unhappy man tried to smile—I burst into tears, so completely was his smile a forced one, and I determined then, not to wish, that he should put such restraint over his feelings—before God, who hears me, I swear to you, that I have never reproached him with his grief; only, little by little I have become discouraged, and overwhelmed; seeing him indifferent to everything, I have become indifferent also. I have let the things go as they would; everything in the house is neglected, the weeds grow all over the garden, as they soon will, over the grave of a poor old woman, who is no longer of any use in this world, since she cannot console her son.”

This depression was such a striking contrast to the firmness; approaching to sternness; which had always characterised Mme. Sécherin, that I was alarmed, that moral weakness, without doubt was the precursor of great physical weakness. I tried to reassure her, these two years must have appeared cruelly long to you, but recollect that your grief will wear itself out; the more violent the regrets of your son have been, the nearer do they approach to their cessation; I, as well, my dear madame have suffered much; I have not only lost the man to whom I had consecrated my whole life, but I have lost my child, and with that, the only chance of happiness that I could still hope for. Yet to my first violent grief a calm has succeeded—a sad calm, it is true, but which is almost happiness in comparison of all that I have gone through. Have courage then, good mother have courage—you are perhaps near the end of the term of your afflictions. I am, like your son the victim of that woman—a profound contempt has replaced the hatred I felt for her; the time may not be far distant, when your son will feel like me.”

Mme. Sécherin bowed her head sadly and answered, with a degree of good sense, which could not fail to convince me.

“It is not the same case; your husband was of your own rank in life, he was to you, a man, neither above or below those you had always been in the habit of associating with—while my poor son had never known a woman, who, in appearance at least, could be compared to that miserable creature.”

Then resuming something of her former energy, Mme. Sécherin exclaimed,

“Ah that infamous woman, in her abominable pride, she guessed right when she predicted to me with the audacity of Lucifer, that such a woman as she was, could not be forgotten, that my son would always regret her! that he would weep for her tears of blood! oh! my God! my God!—your will is impenetrable, one must have great faith not to despair of your justice—one must love one's child to a great degree to be able to persist in a love for him which is so useless.”

Mme. Sècherin returned to that thought which seemed to be so painful to her ; I endeavoured to distract her ideas.

"Do not think so, said I : without you, without your assiduous cares, the life of your son would be a thousand times more dreadful."

"How could that be ? he could not regret that woman more than he regrets her now ; replied Mme. Sècherin with gloomy obstinacy. Yes, for if he were not so very unhappy, I should say that he is become a bad son, and ungrateful."

"Oh ! madame."

"I should say that he remains with me only to preserve appearances, and because, in the first moments of his rage ; he swore by the memory of his father, never to forgive that guilty one—oh ! I have suffered much, without saying a word—for two years—I have endured a great deal—formerly, when he believed in the virtue of that that woman, I could understand his preference of her to me ; but after what has occurred, that she should still possess his heart ; at last I must say it—it makes me indignant—it is highly offensive to me."

"You are mistaken perhaps, said I to her, one may feel anger, and resentment for a long time, against those who have deceived us, before that is sufficient to lessen their influence. Generous minds are so susceptible of those deep feelings. Treachery is the more cutting to them ; in as much as their confidence has been more entire."

"I bless your arrival ; said Mme. Sècherin, drying her eyes, I have been able to say to you, what I have said to no one else, for the last two years ; my heart has been filled with bitterness. I trust to God that it may not overflow ; and that my son may never know the harm he has done me. Yet it is possible it may burst out at last ! a moment may come, when I can contain myself no longer."

"Oh ! take care, exclaimed I, what would your life, and his be ; if that were the case !"

The fact is, that I shall become tired, at last ; not of sacrificing my life to him, No ; the short time that I have to live belongs of right to him, but I shall get tired of seeing him suffer, as if he were alone, and abandoned by every one. I shall get tired of seeing that a disgraceful attachment to an infamous woman obliterates from the heart of my son, the gratitude that he owes to me—Oh ! say, continued she with increasing violence and grief, is it not terrible to see one's son consuming by a slow fire, and not to be able to save him—when it must be for that purpose that God still retains me on the earth."

This conversation revealed to me that the situation of M. Sècherin and his mother, was even more trying than I had imagined. I saw just at that moment, M. Sècherin pass slowly before the windows of the drawing-room ; he stopped a moment, looked at me and then went on. I thought he was coming in to join us, but it was not the case ; imagining that he might wish to speak to me in private, I





*From the original*

150. Opera Box.

was thinking how I could meet him, when his mother said to me :  
 " My son, without doubt, wished to speak to you, and afterwards had not courage.....look there, he is walking in the shrubbery."

I seized that opportunity.

" If you will allow me, I will go to him, you know he always felt some confidence in me ; perhaps I may be able to inspire him with courage ; perhaps I may be able to help him to conquer this insurmountable sadness."

Madame Sécherin held out her hand to her, and bowed her head.

" Always generous and good," said she.

" Always feeling for the ills that I have experienced myself," said I.

I found M. Sécherin in the same shrubbery where I had first overheard the confessions of love from M. de Lancry to Ursula.

In approaching my cousin, I was still more struck with the alteration in his features. Alas ! why is it that nothing but misfortunes and despair can put the stamp of dignity on a vulgar countenance : while happiness and contentment never ennoble it.

The face of M. Sécherin, before so jolly, so debonnaire, and so smiling, was now pale as marble. He was frightfully thin ; his eyes, hollow and red with crying, shone with the glare of fever ; his features altogether had an expression of savage grief which gave them a character of elevation which I could not have conceived they possibly could have acquired. On seeing me, he shuddered, threw his eyes up to Heaven, and cried with a broken voice :

" And you also ; she has done much injury to you !".....

" Yes, indeed, my cousin, much injury—but I have courage—I have been, like you, deceived, abandoned—well now I despise, I endeavour to forget those who have so outraged my feelings ; calm has been restored to my heart, and yet I have not had, as you have, a mother to console me."

M. Sécherin made me no answer, he walked at my side with tottering steps, then stopping suddenly before me ; he folded his arms and said to me with a burst of rage, his looks lighted up with fury :

" I have not yet killed your husband—I must appear to you a great coward, do I not ? but patience, patience," added he, with a gloomy and determined air, " my poor mother will die one of these days."

And he continued his walk in silence.

These few words explained to me the conduct of M. Sécherin, he waited only for the death of his mother to exact a bloody retribution, I no longer loved M. de Lancry, but the idea of this duel was horrible to me. I replied to my cousin :

" Your mother will live long enough for your regrets to have

become so much lessened—that you will leave it to God to punish the guilty.

M. Sécherin burst into a savage laugh, and cried: "Leave my vengeance to God!" and he added in a low voice, and in a tone that made me shudder, "you do not know then that I think sometime that my mother lives too long for my hopes of vengeance."

"Oh! that is frightful!" exclaimed I, "you—you who were always such a good son."

"I am no longer a good son," replied he with increasing fury; "I am no longer anything—nothing but a miserable fool, who passes half his life in regretting and calling upon the name of an infamous woman, and the other half in cursing her, and dreaming of vengeance; look you, there are moments when I feel capable of deserting my mother, although I know that it will be her death blow."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes! I am capable of anything when I think that your husband may die before me or that Ursula may think that I am a coward—that I dare not fight."

Almost stupified, I looked at M. Sécherin; his fear of appearing a coward in the eyes of Ursula, convinced me how violent his love still was for her.

"You must forget Ursula, she is not worthy of a place in your thoughts."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"And you also—you are like my mother, I must forget her! forget her! tell my heart to cease to beat, tell my blood not to circulate in my veins—tell me to forget her!"

"But that woman is an infamous one."

"But I adore her—that infamous woman; and your husband has deserted you for her, you who are worth a thousand such as she is!" cried M. Sécherin, almost with brutality.

For a moment, I confess, I was silenced; it appeared to me that Ursula must indeed possess irresistible powers of fascination; that two men, whose natures were so different, as M. de Lancry, and M. Sécherin, should both be so passionately in love with her.

My cousin continued with a gloomy air:

"Forget her! forget her!—and why should I forget her? Till the moment of her guilt, who has ever done for me what she did?"

"But your mother—"

"But my mother was only my mother—and my wife was my wife!" cried he, angrily. "The time that I spent with Ursula will always be considered by me as the happiest period of my life. She, who was so superior to me in education and wit, she condescended to belong to me! and then so beautiful—"

oh! so beautiful! What nights of furious rage I have passed in my now solitary room, calling for her with loud cries. Forget her! Why do you not know that I loved her as much, perhaps more, for her ravishing beauty, than for her charming wit. Forget her! and for what? To live *ête-à-ête* with my mother; is it not so? What a compensation!"

"But what you are saying is shocking; do you not think it must be very painful to her to see how vain are all her attempts to console you?"

"Why what does my mother want? she is happy and contented; I have abandoned Ursula to her fate; I have sworn by the memory of my father never to see her again—never to forgive her; I have kept my promise, notwithstanding all it costs me. Why should my mother grudge me my tears—my tears that I hide from her, as much as I can; nevertheless—"

His lips trembled convulsively, large tears rolled down his cheeks; he hid his face in his hands, and threw himself on a bank, sobbing. Frightened by the sight of such violent emotion, I remained silent.

"I am ridiculous, I am vile, I am mad—I know it," continued my cousin, drying his eyes; "but how can I help it? It is something that overpowers me, that I have not strength to struggle against. Despise me! I deserve it, for I love her still!"

"You love her still?"

"Yes. It is culpable—it is horrible, but I love her as much as I ever loved her."

"My God! is it possible!"

"I have endeavoured to reason on it; I have repeated to myself that her conduct with your husband was a thousand times more blamable than if she had loved him. I have said that she must be corrupted indeed to have given herself to him in the manner she has done—and yet—but for my mother—do you hear—but for my mother, over and over again I should have made up my mind either to kill M. de Lancry or to be killed by him. If I had killed him, I should have thrown myself at the feet of Ursula and forgiven her everything; and I am sure that by dint of indulgence and consideration for her, I should have restored her to good principles; for, do you understand, no one knew her so well as I did; I am sure her head is to blame rather than her heart."

"My cousin, I do not like to heap more blame on the absent, but your wife has done me injury sufficient to warrant my speaking my mind; not so much for the sake of recrimination as to induce you to endeavour to conquer a love that is unworthy of you. Ursula is as false as she is wicked; for ten years she has entertained towards me an implacable hatred, and during those ten years she never ceased to evince in her behaviour to me the most hypocritical tenderness."

But after all she never loved your husband ! cried he, without returning me any answer. Had it not been for my mother, I might have taken advantage of that confession to forgive her, and to break off that connection at its very commencement, but women are so implacable in their hatred ! My mother has never forgotten that I once sacrificed her to Ursula—Oh ! she has remembered it well, and if the whole happiness of my life were to be sacrificed, if I were to die of grief and herself also, it was necessary to her vengeance that I should swear never to forgive Ursula.

But your life must now be one of purgatory ?

Yes ! yes ! it is indeed to me a state of purgatory !—before my mother I endeavour to restrain myself, but I suffer martyrdom,—at other times I am ready to curse myself for remaining so insensible to all the consolation she tries to give me ; I feel all the distress it must occasion her, but I cannot help it—I am so weak—so unworthy—purgatory !—did you say ? it is indeed purgatory—and yet my poor mother is one of the best of women ! and I—I am not a wicked man. I love her, I love her very tenderly, and yet I feel that I continually grieve her, that I wound her heart every minute. Oh ! curses on the chance that threw Ursula in my path ; I should have married a woman in my own rank of life ; my life, as well as my mother's would not have been embittered. Oh ! if you knew what an existence is mine, my God ! if you did but know it. I no longer take the slightest interest in my affairs ; I know nothing about my fortune ; I have engaged a man of business to see to all that.....of what use is wealth to me now ! It was for *her* that I wished to be rich—she knew it.... she might have made me do any thing that she wished.... I am sure that I could have found out the means of doubling my fortune, were it only to give her pleasure..... and all for the sake of seeing her beautiful countenance lighted up with happiness, and to see her thank me with that charming smile....” then putting his two fists to his eyes, he cried with a hoarse voice : “ her features, her smile...I shall never see them again...no, never, never. .but I have deserved it ; I had not the courage to forgive her,—I listened to the implacable hatred of my mother, I have not acted like a man, but like a child...like a fool.”

Then walking on, with agitation, he continued :

“ Forgive me, forgive me, my cousin...Alas ! this is the picture of each day for the last two years that I have spent with my mother. In that house, cold and silent as the tomb...during the day I walk... I go on without knowing where I am going to ; then I come in in dinner ; during all the time I look at the place where *she* used to sit ; afterwards I remain with my mother ; we read by turns ; I read mechanically, without hearing or comprehending what I read. At eleven o'clock my mother reads prayers aloud, and we separate ; then I go into *our* room, which I would not consent to quit ; then

begin my torments—there I endure, as much as I did the very first day, all the torture of the most frantic and despairing jealousy, when I think—”

Then, without concluding his speech, M. Sècherin drew himself up, stamped his foot with rage, and cried, raising his hands to heaven :

“ Oh ! I will kill him—that man—I will kill him !” and he continued walking on with quick strides.

One of the servants of Madame Sècherin came from her to beg us to return to the drawing-room.

“ My son,” said she, when we came in, “ your cousin is perhaps in haste to get on to Paris ; we must not detain her too long.”

“ In truth, very important business calls me there,” said I, “ and which admits of no delay, otherwise I should have encroached on your hospitality for a few days.”

“ You have at least spoken reason to him,” said Madame Sècherin to me, pointing to her son.

“ I have spoken to him of you, madame, and no son can be more respectful or tender ; believe me.”

“ I believe it, for I wish only his own good.”

“ He knows it, madam.” I then made a sign to M. Sècherin, to say something kind to his mother ; his coldness frightened me. I feared lest Mme. Sècherin should take advantage of my presence to address some of those reproaches to him, which she had for so long suppressed.

M. Sècherin approached his mother, took her hand kissed it and said :

“ Forgive me, my mother ; you know I have been suffering for a long time, and that makes my disposition uncertain ; I have made my confession to my cousin. She has scolded me well,” added he smiling sadly, “ and I will try to behave better in future.”

“ It will cost you much to do so, without doubt,” said his mother with severity.

What I dreaded was on the point of happening : Mme. Sècherin feeling herself wounded before me in her dignity as mother ; could no longer keep concealed how much her son had made her suffer for a long time past by his indifference.

I threw a supplicating glance at M. Sècherin to induce him to keep his temper ; but his too had for a long time been much embittered. My presence had re-opened his wounds. I shuddered to think that perhaps I should be the unintentional cause of a violent scene.

However M. Sècherin looked down without answering his mother, who resumed in a louder voice :

“ A good son should love his mother above everything.”

“ Whatever it may have cost me, I have done whatever I could,

to prove my submission to you—my mother, I can do no more," replied her son coldly.

"And yet the life we lead is all in consequence of that infamous woman's proceedings whom he still regrets!" cried Mme. Sécherin. "I was frightened at the turn that the conversation was taking. I hastened to say——"

"Oh madam, excuse him, he loved her so much."

"He is capable of loving her still—an unworthy love causes a person to appear such a coward."

The eyes of my cousin sparkled; he exclaimed:

"It is not an unworthy love, alone, which may cause a person to appear cowardly, my mother! but it is now long enough that I have exercised restraint over myself—I must speak out at last."

"And I also," cried his mother; enraged, "it is long enough that I have suffered, it is too long since you have forgotten all you owe me—I repeat to you that your unworthy regrets are unpardonable—they are an offence against your mother."

"My cousin!" cried I.

He could restrain himself no longer.

"The most noble sentiments—the most holy duties may also lead to the appearance of cowardice—do you understand me; my mother."

"What does he mean?"

"Not another word," said I to M. Sécherin, and I added in a low voice:

"Will you then give the death-blow to your mother—at her last hour—when she thinks of the danger you are going to incur in a duel."

"You are right, you are right; I am mad and wicked to have answered her as I have done—my grief is so offensive to her because she loves me tenderly," then, throwing himself on his knees before his mother he took her hand and kissed it; saying, "forgive me, my mother, I was wrong to speak in the manner I did."

"A mother should forgive everything," said she with a sigh, and she kissed the forehead of her son, while she gave me a look of despair.

"And a son should suffer everything," replied M. Sécherin in a low voice, and his look also, proved to me his despair.

.....  
I quitted Rouvray with feeling of the deepest sorrow.

I could not imagine a more melancholy spectacle than that of this mother and son, always together, she regretting the loss of his affections, and he regretting the love of a guilty woman. I could not suppress a feeling of profound indignation when I reflected that my husband was lost to me; my child dead; and my life em-

bittered, that a pious woman and her generous son, who had originally been so happy together, were for ever, disunited in affection, and all because Ursula had hated and envied me.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE RETURN.

Two months after my departure from Maran, I was established at Paris in the pavillion that Madame de Richeville had offered me.

I have often asked myself; how I could have inspired that excellent woman, with such an affection; which she never ceased to evince towards me, and of which she gave me so many fresh proofs on my return to Paris; it was with the most tender interest, the most maternal care; that she endeavoured to spare me the slightest annoyance. When I recollected the infamous calumnies of which she had been the victim, I was astonished to see on what terms of friendly intimacy she lived with those persons who certainly formed the elite of the first society in Paris, and who were even reckoned (pardon me the expression) very *straight laced*.

This return of good opinion, in favour of Mme. de Richeville ought not so have surprised me, people of strict morals are indulgent to the past errors of a person who seeks their patronage, if their present mode of life is irreproachable.

Justly proud of the kind of *worldly conversion* that their salutary influence has effected, they defend, and support their new convert with all the generous ardour of proselytism.

Madame de Richeville had therefore now as really devoted friends, those, who before, had sincerely pited her misfortunes and deplored her faults. The picture that she had given me of some of those who composed her constant society, was strikingly correct; by chance, I was enabled to judge of this; the first day of my arrival in Paris.

My carriage broke down at Etampes; delayed by that accident, I did not, contrary to my intention, arrive in Paris, at Madame de Richeville's, till ten in the evening. No longer expecting me that day, she had received her guests according to her usual custom; what was my astonishment when my carriage stopped at the door, to perceive Madame de Richeville accompanied by the Prince D'Hericourt! my courier, who had preceded me a quarter of an hour, had announced my carriage; and Madame de Richeville had gone down to meet me as soon as possible.

I found, that evening, at her house, the Princess D'Hericourt,

Meedames de Sémur and de Grandval, who all received me with the most perfect affability and kindness.

One must have mixed in the society I am describing in order to understand the mixture of kindness and reserve which marked their manner towards me ; I excited a lively sympathy in them, but with a degree of discretion, full of delicacy, they avoided everything that could remind me, in any direct manner, of the misfortunes which they wished to make me forget.

It would be difficult to say in what those delicate shades consisted, yet, thanks to them, instead of being wounded by an indiscrete compassion, I was surrounded by the most gratifying and charming solicitude. I shall never forget the words of the venerable Princess D'Hericourt, when I was presented to her that evening by Madame de Richeville.

"Though I have the pleasure of seeing you now for the first time, madame," said she to me, "I have known you, and allow me to add, I have loved you, ever since I have heard you spoken of, by my dear Amelie (the christain name of Madame de Richeville,) myself and her other friends, who are also yours, always pressed her to hasten your return to Paris ; at your age, (an old grandmother may tell this,) at your age solitude is dangerous ; isolated from all exercise of the affections, one ends by suspecting all the world of egotism or insensibility. But, I assure you, this is not the case ; I have always observed the most touching and noble sympathy evinced to those whose misfortunes have deserved it."

"As for me, madame," gaily exclaimed the Countess de Semur, with cordial vivacity ; let them accuse me of paradoxes, as they have so often done. I confess to you that I almost wish you had remained buried in Lorraine, you were our *ideal* ; in order to console ourselves for not having you among us, we declared that an ideal was a mere dream, and never to be realised, whereas if we were to lose you *now* we should regret you doubly.

Then as I modestly disclaimed so much praise ; the Princess D'Hericourt taking my hand, said to me in a voice of much emotion :

"Pray remember, madame, that there are in a young woman, other qualities besides beauty, grace and wit to cause our admiration-- and you will then feel the difference that exists between mere flattery and real and deserved praise.

"After these presentations I approached Emma ; she struck me as being most dazzlingly beautiful ; when I had seen her at Maran she was only fourteen, two years had perfected her figure, which was sylph-like, yet majestic, as the ancient statues of Diana.

"I make that theological comparison because the features of Emma, as well as all her movements were distinguished by a species of gracefulness so serious, so chaste, and so thoughtful, that I should

designate it, by the appellation of majestic, if I might apply such a word to a young girl of sixteen, whose blue eyes, and frank smile expressed a degree of infantine candour. That evening, as usual, Emma was occupied with the duties of the tea table ; which she fulfilled with an amiable attention to all, that enchanted me, there was something in her manner that gave a value to the slightest and most trifling action.

"I shall never forget the melancholy smile, that Mme. Richeville gave me, when Emma said to her, in her soft and harmonious voice : "may I offer you any tea Madam !"

Alas ! that word so cold and indifferent ; *Madame !* struck to the heart of that poor mother ; she was obliged to submit to it ; her child was to her ; nothing more than *Mademoiselle de Lostange* a distant orphan relation.

After a few days Emma got intimate with me, and I could not help admiring her ingenuous and artless character ! her heart was so sincere, so straightforward, so averse to the slightest dissimulation, that she could never understand how certain faults and vices could exist.

Bad actions were to her, effects without a cause, they seemed a kind of monstrous and inexplicable accident ; the odious calculations, and the corrupt instincts which lead to crime were unknown to her ; her understanding was deficient when bad passions were to be comprehended ; Emma was an exception as rare of *her* kind, as *Mademoiselle Maran* was of hers.

It was not long before I discovered the cause of the kind of vague *tristesse* which seemed to increase the natural melancholy of Emma. The poor child regretted the mother whom she had lost, they told her, in her infancy ; her gratitude to Madame de Richeville was tender and sincere ; but Emma argued in this manner with touching *simplicité*.—"Since such a distant relation is so kind to me, what would my mother not have been !"

Having discovered the cause of Emma's sadness I took care not to let Madame de Richeville suspect it ; it would have been a frightful blow to her : with her adoration for her daughter she would, perhaps, have been tempted to confess to her the secret of her birth ; and I could not foresee what the effect of that confession might have on the feelings of Emma towards Madame de Richeville ; what a cruel struggle would have taken place in the pure mind of that young girl when she learnt that her mother had committed such a fault ; and that her birth, poor girl, was little less than a crime !

Emma was frankness itself ; and I was not wanting in penetration, and yet I felt that there was something about her which I could not understand.

It was strange ! I was convinced that she had some secret, and that she was ignorant herself of that secret ; I knew she was incapable of dissimulation ; she had not mentioned to Madame de

Richeville her regrets for her mother, entirely because she feared they would be painful to her, who had always shewn her maternal care.

I came therefore to the conclusion that Emma hid something from me, not through dissimulation, but from ignorance ; and because she could not explain any more than I could, the cause of certain emotions which I had observed in her.

Thus, when winter was come, and she saw the first snow fall, she became as white as the snow, trembled, and exclaimed dolorously, " Oh ! that snow ! "

I was alone with her, and I asked what made her exclaim in that manner : she answered me.

" I know not why, but the sight of that snow gave me such a pang, now I do not care about it. "

I asked her if the thoughts of the poor people who would suffer from the cold, had anything to do with her exclamation. She replied, with the utmost *navet  *, No ! she pitied them very much, but at that moment she had not thought of them ; at the sight of the snow her heart was painfully struck, she knew not why ; but that the impression was already effaced.

And again, before her mother and me, I know not apropos of what, but we mentioned nightingales.

Emma's eyes filled with tears ; she said to me with an angelic smile :

" I know not why, but when you speak of nightingales I feel such a delicious emotion, I can hardly prevent myself from crying. "

Another time, when some soldiers were passing the house with their band, Emma got up, drew her figure up to the utmost of her height, her eye brilliant and cheeks flushed ; listening to that martial sound with such exultation that her charming countenance took an expression quite heroic.

The band passed on ; the sound of it died away ; Emma looked around with astonishment, threw herself blushing and confused into the arms of Madame de Richeville, took her hand which she placed on her heart, and said with enchanting grace :

" Forgive me—I am foolish, but I could not restrain myself ; reel my heart, how it beats. "

In truth her heart was beating most violently.

What was this mystery ? what was the secret cause of these emotions ? Alas ! I discovered later, but at that time Emma was as ignorant as I was.

With the exception of these involuntary impressions, the cause of which could not be discovered, one might read all the thoughts of her ingenuous mind, as pure and transparent as crystal.

Such was Emma.

Gradually we shall see her character developping itself in its

charming ignorance. like those precious flowers which are unconscious of the perfume which is exhaled from them, or the colours which adorn them.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I was at Maran I had entreated Madame de Richeville not to write me a word about M. de Lancry or Ursula I wished to avoid everything that could remind me of them: once at Paris, surrounded by new friends, I was more courageous. Madame de Richeville had her information from people well acquainted with the conduct of my husband. This is what I learnt:

Mademoiselle de Maran redoubled her calumnies and her wickedness. After bringing Ursula back with her to Paris, to live with her, she gave out that it was my jealousy, as unjust as it was violent, which had caused the separation between M. Sécherin and his wife, that I had accused my cousin to her husband and had mentioned as proofs of Ursula's guilt, some things which were merely appearances that were deceiving.

My aunt added that that proceeding was the more unpardonable in me, as my connection with M. Lugarto left me no right to complain of the infidelities of my husband, or to blame the conduct of other women, that at last, M. de Lancry, already driven from me by the violence of my temper; had discovered that during his stay in England I had so completely laid aside all common decency, that I had passed a night in M. Lugarto's house; that M. de Lancry then resolved to quit me, and Mademoiselle de Maran notwithstanding the affection she felt for me could not help acknowledging that M. de Lancry had full reason for so doing; and felt it to be her duty to protect that poor Ursula, the victim of my treachery and jealousy.

These calumnies, absurd as they were, would not have been the less dangerous if Madame de Richeville, to guard her friends against them, had not related to them all the scene in the solitary house of M. Lugarto, just as M. de Mortagne had told it her on his dying bed.

That relation, the proceedings of M. de Lancry, and the present conduct of Ursula, sufficed to clear me from the odious accusations of my aunt.

The revolution of July, by dividing and dispersing the legitimate society, had, in some degree thinned the drawing-rooms of Mademoiselle de Maran, she had owed the assiduity with which her society had been courted at the time of the restoration, to the fear that she inspired, and to the violent enmity, or powerful protection, she had it in her power to gratify.

When there was no longer anything either to be dreaded or

hoped for, she was neglected, for her unamiable character evinced itself more and more with her years, her house offered no attraction, no amusement; her economy had degenerated into avarice, and gradually she found herself completely isolated.

The mortification this caused her, was the real cause of her visit to Maran. To console herself for that, she came, without doubt, to do me all the mischief that was in her power. In taking Ursula's part against her mother-in-law, in proposing to her to go back with her to Paris, she still yielded to the instinct of hatred which she felt for me; but, when she perceived the powerful influence of Ursula's unrivalled attractions, she resolved to make use of them to re-fill her deserted drawing-rooms.

She had more knowledge of the world than most people; she gave out everywhere, that Ursula was separated from her husband. There is always an irresistible attraction in the hopes of pleasing a young and handsome woman, who is in such an independent position; Mademoiselle de Maran therefore was no longer neglected. Ursula, more beautiful, and more coquettish than ever, was soon surrounded by a numerous train of followers. M. de Lancry, apprised of all that was going on, by his confidential servant, whom he had sent for that purpose, to Paris, became mad with jealousy; it was then that he left me to rejoin Ursula.

What I have now to relate will appear, without doubt, very base; but unfortunately, as I advance in life, I have often heard of similar proceedings; let all who read this, ransack their memory, and they will find that the facts I have now to lay before them, have nothing exaggerated, or improbable in them, and that on the contrary they are rather remarkable for a species of delicacy seldom exercised under such circumstances.

Ursula was passionately fond of all kinds of luxury, splendour and *fêtes*! she did not find that taste gratified at Mademoiselle de Maran's. My aunt, rich enough to receive her friends in good style, was yet further than ever from thinking of giving balls, or taking boxes at the theatres; in short, of keeping up any style of living more modern, more elegant, or more expensive, than she had ever done. M. de Lancry, when he arrived in Paris, found Ursula playing the part of a regular coquette, with two or three men, who belonged to my aunt's society; notwithstanding his blind passion, he knew women, (and a particular sort) too well not to have guessed at the wishes of Ursula, but out of regard to her, and himself, he could not openly propose to indulge her in her penchant for splendour and expense. It was well known that she had only her portion of sixty thousand francs, the origin of her luxury once known, Ursula would fall into the deepest contempt, and would be shunned by that world, in the midst of which, she wished to shine. M. de Lancry, whether with the knowledge of my aunt or not, I never could learn,

found out a most ingenious manner of arranging, in a word, to surround his mistress with splendour, without injuring her in the estimation of the world, and to secure to her, on the contrary, the sympathies of a coterie of very good society, over which Mademoiselle de Maran presided. Had she not been actuated by the hatred that she bore to me, without doubt, she would have shrunk from the shameless partnership which she entered into, in that infamous transaction. As to the manner in which these details became known to me, that belongs to a new series of mysterious events which unhappily proved to me that the evil genius of M. Lugarto was still hovering over me, and those who were becoming more and more dear to me.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CORRESPONDENCE.

About three months after my arrival in Paris, Blondeau gave me a small packet that a porter had brought, I opened it, and turned pale with fright when I saw it consisted of a bouquet of the same poisonous, bright red flowers, that M. Lugarto had once before sent me, and which had since become his symbol ; Madame de Rieheville having received a bouquet of them, the day of M. de Mortagne's death ; with the bouquet, was the following letter, written by my husband to one of his friends, whose name I was unable to find out, as the envelope had been taken off.

How M. de Lugarto, who was not in Paris (at least I thought not) could have intercepted the correspondence of M. de Lancry, I could not guess then ; but I was not surprised at it ; thanks to his immense command of money, that man had the means of bribing the servants, or even of placing his own spies, in the families of all those, whose proceedings he wished to be acquainted with.

As to the motive, for this action, there could be no doubt as to that : not knowing how indifferent I had become to M. de Lancry, M. Lugarto thought he should inflict a cruel wound on me, in unveiling the secret of my husband's proceedings with Ursula. If that intention was not literally fulfilled, the letter, at least, cost me some painful feelings of resentment ; M. Lugarto's purpose was therefore, in part, accomplished.

This is my husband's letter.

Paris Jan. 1835.

M. de Lancry a———

I THANK you for your letter, my dear friend ; mine must have as-

tonished you, a month since, in answer to yours, in which you asked me for the particulars which I gave you, and you added :

"What are you doing? Can I believe the news that, by chance, I have heard even here in my desert! Is it true that you are the fortunate favourite of the most fascinating woman in Paris, who, by dint of her charms and wit, makes people forget that she bears the vulgar name of Madame Sécherin? Is it true that Mademoiselle de Maran, the aunt of your love, of your *Euridice*, is almost ruining herself, by entering into the most extravagant expenses; that the splendour of her *fetes*, and the luxury displayed in her house are cited everywhere, it appears to me that to enter on a course of extravagance at her age, is beginning rather late."

I answered some of your questions, and I will now continue to do so, for just at present my heart is overflowing with hatred and malice.

"You are one of those experienced men to whom one can confide everything, because you can understand me; you have entered into every kind of excess in Paris—you have killed three men in duels; you have survived a horrible wound that you inflicted on yourself, in an attempt to blow your brains out. Now, cured of those kinds of follies, as you call them, you became a philosopher, an observer, and a dreamer in your old house in Bretagne, happy in watching the waves incessantly beating against the sandy shore—that is to say you are of firm character, and have great knowledge of human weaknesses; you will not therefore be astonished at what I have now to confide to you.

I am surrounded by such a set of idiots; or of envious competitors that I would rather destroy myself, than let them find out how much I suffer; they would be too happy. You will despise me perhaps, stoic as you are, but I cannot help that; I cannot bear these sufferings any longer without complaining to some one, both of my torments and my happiness, since even my happiness is a torment.

I felt a great relief after I had written my first letter to you; I continue therefore, as you told me you could give me no advice till you knew the conclusion of my history—here it is,

"Distracted with jealousy on hearing that Ursula was in Paris surrounded by admirers; resolving at all events to assert my rights, notwithstanding the little hope that was left to me from the insolent letter she had written me, and which fell into the hands of her husband, I quitted Maran, I deserted my wife, and I arrived here.

"I found Ursula as usual beautiful, satirical, fantastical and haughty; when I wished to allude to my past happiness, she loaded me with mockery; I dissembled my anger, for I had a project in view.

"Mademoiselle de Maran, my wife's aunt received me wonderfully well, I have told you of the hatred she bears towards Matilda;

that will help you to understand what follows ; I knew that Ursula had the most extravagant love for all kinds of luxury and pleasures, and would make great sacrifices to gratify that taste ; but I knew also that, notwithstanding her poverty, notwithstanding the boldness of her principles, the effrontery of her character, she was, by a strange mixture of pride and independence, incapable of certain acts of baseness.

"I felt the best means I could adopt to obtain some hold upon her, was to enable her to lead that splendid kind of existence which had been the dream, and desire of her whole life, and to do that, without wounding her susceptibility, which often prompted her to take offence.

"To understand the determination that I then took you must remember that I never hesitate sacrificing any sum of money however immense it may be, if it be to gratify any desire of my own, however unreasonable that may be ; you must also be assured that I loved, and still love, Ursula with all the ardour, all the torment of a love, irritated, opposed, harassing, and always unsatisfied.....

"Now this is the scheme that I adopted to render myself indispensable to Ursula, by surrounding her with every kind of splendour and means of enjoyment without offending her delicacy, and without giving any clue for the world to penetrate the origin of that mystery.

"Mme. de Maran's hatred towards my wife, whom she would be delighted to ruin, aided my project, in what manner I will explain to you.

"One day, before Ursula, who as I told you, lives with her, I asked Mademoiselle Maran how much she spent a year on her household expenses, her carriages, etc., etc. She told me forty-thousand francs. I exclaimed that she was cheated, that she scarcely saw any company ; that her equipages were horrible ; and that with that sum I could engage that she should keep the best house in Paris, if she would trust to me, and follow my advice.

"In what way ? enquired she.

"Give me forty thousand francs. Do not give yourself any trouble about your expenses at all, for a year ; you will see in what style I will make you live ; only if you accept my proposal you must pass a few months in the country to give me time to make the necessary alterations in your hotel, and that without putting you to any further expense ; as I shall defray it from the annual rent of forty thousand francs.

"Ursula looked at me, I believed she guessed my intentions, for a smile—(oh ! if you knew what a smile is hers !) was my recompense for this ingenious stratagem ?

"You understand at once, do you not ? Ursula was to enjoy all the luxuries nominally provided by the forty thousand francs of

Mademoiselle de Maran, who accepted my proposal, laughing heartily ; (she always laughs when she is acting treacherously). A fortnight after this arrangement Mademoiselle de Maran was settled at Auteuil with Ursula in a charming house belonging to an Englishman who, having become tired of it, as I told them, let it for next to nothing—I have always had the talent of inventing some excuse, when I have the command of money. It is useless to tell you, how much that arrangement about the house at Auteuil cost me, I went there every day. It was really like a fairy cottage. During that time the alterations at the hotel in Paris proceeded rapidly. I began with the carriages ; I replaced the heavy old-fashioned coaches of Mademoiselle de Maran by the prettiest equipages in Paris. Knowing how much Ursula enjoyed riding on horseback, I persuaded Mademoiselle de Maran to let one of her apartments to my uncle, the Duke de Versac, who had been completely ruined by the revolution of July ; he served as a chaperon to Ursula in her rides on horseback with me, and took her out when Mademoiselle de Maran could not go with her.

"Thanks to my activity, by the beginning of the winter the hotel de Maran was changed into a perfect palace ; a magnificent reception-room, was reserved for visitors ; Ursula's apartment, the temple of my cherished idol, was a perfect specimen of luxury and elegance ; I filled it with rare furniture, precious China, and beautiful pictures of the best masters. Mademoiselle de Maran was supposed to be mad, for the expenses that I entered into, were of course attributed to her, she allowed this to be believed, and for a thousand reasons you may be sure I did not contradict it.

"Mademoiselle de Maran, during the winter gave some splendid balls ; during Lent excellent concerts ; and in the spring charming *soirées champêtres* in her very large garden, where I had effected wonders.

"The Hotel de Maran became one of the most agreeable, the most *recherchée* houses in Paris. Mademoiselle de Maran had a box at the opera and one at the comic theatre, and all this for those eternal forty thousand francs that she was to allow me annually.

"When I gave her in an account of her expenses, at the end of the first year, she burst into a fit of laughter, declared that I was a magician, and begged me to continue to be her purveyor ; I had expended more than ten thousand louis. It is not necessary to tell you that Ursula was the queen of these fêtes, given for her, and almost by her, for she did the honours of them, with exquisite grace, and unrivalled dignity ; she was become an excellent musician. At the concerts, at the Hotel de Maran she shewed talents of a superior order ; in a short time no one was talked of but her, her brilliant and bold wit, her vivacity so entertaining and satirical,





'You must forget, Ursula.'

above all, her audacious coquetry, which put me to the torture and excited in me all the agonies of jealousy.

"Mademoiselle de Maran even felt the influence of this seductive woman; for she enchanted all who approached her; in her intercourse with women, always even tempered, indolent, complimentary, and insinuating; with men, by turns whimsical, provokingly *brusque*, or freezingly indifferent; thanks to this mixture of contradictory qualities, she passed off for a living *enigma*, and might risk any extraordinary proceeding, with impunity.

"Strange contrast, that woman who enjoyed without any scruple, all the expenses that I incurred for her in Mademoiselle de Maran's name, treated me with the greatest harshness, the most unqualified contempt, because I once offered to make her a present of some jewels on her birth-day.

"On reflection, that does not astonish me, Ursula has a great deal of tact; it is known that she is poor, the least appearance of personal luxury might have compromised her; she therefore established a mode of dress, peculiar to herself, uniting at once the utmost simplicity with perfect elegance; she has so charming a neck, and arms of such perfect contour and whiteness, that it is rather coquetry in her, to go without either necklace or bracelets. Her toilet consists, for the evening, of a white crape dress, always looking fresh, and made with admirable taste, a natural flower in her beautiful hair, a bouquet of the same in front of her dress, she never wears any more ornament than this. In the morning, a simple little bonnet, a plain dress, and large cashmere shawl. You may perceive that her sixty thousand francs would easily defray the expenses of her personal appearance.

"With regard to the magnificence which surrounds her and of which she does the honors, she is as proud and as happy as if she were the possessor of, instead of being the pretext, for them, for this singular woman cares less for the possession, than the enjoyment of luxuries; this distinction will appear rather a subtle one to you, but if you knew Ursula you would find it to be correct.

"Well, notwithstanding so much devotion, notwithstanding so many sacrifices, I am not happy. I feel the conviction that I am become necessary to Ursula, I am sure that she would not like to renounce the empire that she exercises over me—but what an empire.

"After the letter that she wrote me, and which fell into the hands of her husband, one would imagine she would have felt great embarrassment at her first interview with me. It was not at all so, notwithstanding what you call my *rouerie*, I was far more embarrassed than she was; this would not astonish you if you knew the turn of her character, her suppleness, her audacity, and the superiority of her wit.

" 'Do you really *think* all that you wrote to me,' enquired I, with some bitterness.

" She began to laugh, for that woman is for ever laughing, and answered.

" 'Are you one of those blind people who confound together the present and the past; what was true yesterday, may it not be false to-day, what was false yesterday, may it not become true at present? do not therefore occupy yourself in endeavouring to discover whether I really thought or not, what I wrote to you, under such different circumstances to those in which I have met you again. You love me, you say; act therefore in such a manner that I may love you, or that I may appear to love you. To force me to feign a sentiment that I do not feel, is still more flattering, than to have inspired a sentiment, that I avow. If I love you sincerely, your heart must be flattered. If I feign that love, your pride will triumph, in either case your share is a good one, I hope you think so?'

" How can one answer such paradoxes, such follies, especially when those follies are murmured into your ear by a mouth of coral, with teeth like pearls, and lips of vermilion? What can one answer when those words are accompanied by a look, ardent, penetrating, and voluptuous—oh, you cannot guess the magic power, exercised by those large blue eyes, which from under their long lashes dart glances that excite passion to the highest pitch—or wickedly delight in freezing you with the expression of their mocking disdain. No, no, such eyes are not to be met with in any one else,

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" Sometimes she appears to feel for me an irresistible love, to which she yields with a kind of tender regret, to describe to you what she is then, in those rare moments of happiness and *abandon* is impossible—as *impossible* is it, to describe to you the passionate grace with which she pretends to blame and avoid me, whilst she yields to the sentiment that I have inspired.

" Oh! you cannot imagine what a torment it is to live, continually, in the alternate states of hope and despair, of joy and tears, of anger and love, of distrust and blindness, you cannot guess with what infernal art that woman knows how to distil, drop by drop, the nectar which intoxicates me, figure to yourself a wretch in the agonies of thirst, whose parched and dried up lips are only moistened at long intervals by drops of that limpid and pure stream, a draught of which would at once appease his thirst.

" Oh! say—say—is it not torturing him, and rendering his thirst more unbearable than before, say, is it not sufficient to

drive one mad? Such however is my life—every moment sacrificed to my love.

"You have now the history of my weakness, my unworthiness, my shame, but also of my secret and almost delirious joy, when Ursula deigns to act the part of a woman towards me, and not that of an insolent and mocking demon.

"Sometimes she almost persuades me, or rather I persuade myself, that notwithstanding her insolent capriciousness, she loves me ardently, and that her strange conduct is only intended to deceive me, as to the measure of love, she feels towards me, and against which her pride revolts; sometimes I think that it is in order to retain possession of my heart, that she feigns all that inconstancy, and disdain, because she knows that satiety might follow, if I had no uneasiness as to the sincerity of her affections—then I see a proof of violent passion in what otherwise would revolt, and cause my indignation.

"At other times, I fancy she only bears with me because through my means her tastes and ambition are gratified.

"Is not this frightful? ah! that infamous creature, she knows that it is those irritating doubts which strengthen my passion for her, she knows it well!

"If I believed myself to be ingenuously and stupidly loved as I have been by my wife, and many others, indifference, and disgust would succeed very quickly—in the same manner, if I could be thoroughly convinced that I was deceived in her I would abandon her without hesitation—but unfortunately no one can clear up those points for me—what do you think yourself of it? and yet why do I ask you? for after all I can be the only judge, and if I am unable to find out, it is not likely you would succeed better.

"Another torment is the struggle between my pride and my self-love; Mademoiselle de Maran carefully avoids anything that could give the least shadow of suspicion in the eyes of the world, of culpable toleration on her part; I have re-sold the house that I had bought of M. de Rochegune, and I have taken lodgings very near the Hôtel de Maran. At Auteuil I have a "*piéd a terre*," and my apparent rights, do not proceed beyond those of common intimacy. As for Ursula, she is no more to me in the world than to all the others who surround her, and many of my friends ask me if I am the happy man or not.

"Sometimes I am quite angry in the thought that a *happiness* which has cost me so dear, should be doubted, and I am rash enough to think of compromising Ursula; at other times, fearing to be deceived, and so incurring ridicule, I help to deceive public opinion myself, by naming my rivals.

"Ah! it is one of the most rancorous of the wounds inflicted by that unworthy and frantic love, that I cannot find out if Ursula is

false to me ! I have had her watched, perhaps she has perceived it, for nothing could be discovered, this has not reassured me, as I believe more in her address than in her virtue.

" Another frightful consequence of such a love as mine, is, that the unworthy actions, the basenesses into which it betrays me, become so many links to bind me still closer to my fatal idol ; sometimes I am indignant that Ursula does not bestow more consideration on all the evil that my love for her has caused ; for the money that I am dissipating in such profusion, is the fortune of my wife, who lives, unhappily and alone ; but that reflection causes me no pity ; I have griefs enough of my own, without thinking of others ; and after all it is an affair of money, and money is a thing I never could take into consideration ; all my dread is to think what will become of me when that fortune is all dissipated ; will Ursula accommodate herself to the altered condition of Mademoiselle de Maran's establishment, for she can never bear to lose her ; she is growing old, and she confesses the horror she should have of solitude ; she could not now part with Ursula for all the world ; but I—I—ah ! what would become of me ?

" To drive away these horrid thoughts, I will give you an example of my persevering care to foresee and gratify even the most frivolous caprices of that woman.

" About two months ago she was sulky with me, I was never more unhappy, that is to say, never more in love ; this is the history. Ursula having taken it into her head to perform a comedy at the Hotel de Maran, a theatre had been erected, as if by magic. Ursula shewed great talent in playing the part of Célimène in the *Misanthrope*, and afterwards, to form one of those contrasts, that she delighted in exhibiting, she took the part allotted to Mademoiselle Dejaset in a little after-piece highly comic. It was enough to turn one's head with love for her, if that had not been already the case.

" All the world were stupified with astonishment ; the most difficult to please were forced to acknowledge that except Mademoiselle Mars, no one had ever acted the part of Célimène with so much grace, dignity, and perfect conception of the character, while in the after-piece Ursula had rivalled Mademoiselle Dejaset in wit and a kind of libertine effrontery, in short, her complete success in two such different styles, was perfectly unequalled.

" ' Transported with love and pride, I flew to her, to join my praises to those of the throng around her ; guess what was her reply with her usual insolence, and habitual cynicism ?

" When a woman of the world takes a part in comedy, her lover should be the last person who should congratulate her on being such a perfect actress.'

" And for some days after she would not speak to me, and flirted

with Lord C——a very agreeable and fashionable man. This time I was really on the point of breaking off with Ursula, but a new caprice of hers, by involving me in another of those foolish expenditures which she takes pleasure in causing, made me again her slave and more in love with her than ever. You must know that I had constructed in the midst of the garden belonging to the Hotel de Maran a very large Swiss *chalet*; in the spring, it served as a ball room, in the interior the walls were covered with wainscoting formed from the wood of the fir trees, and edged with a light green bordering, forming a rustic and pretty effect.

"I arrived there grave and out of spirits, Ursula was in the *chalet* with Mademoiselle de Mars and Lord C—— in the midst of the conversation, Ursula exclaimed, pointing to the walls of the pavillion ;

"How beautiful this place would be, lined with natural flowers—the interior of the *chalet* fitted up in that manner would be perfectly charming. It is a great pity that the idea should be nothing more than a mere fairy dream.

"Lord C—— and Mademoiselle de Maran both exclaimed, that it would be impossible to realise such an idea. Ursula gave me a look, the full power of which she well knew, and then spoke of something else, I perfectly understood her.

"The next day the interior of the *chalet* presented an unbroken surface of flowers, so symmetrically arranged that the mass of blossoms formed a flat surface, of jasmin, lilies, and roses, as white as snow, upon which large bouquets of red roses were placed at regular intervals, tied with floating ribbons of sky blue, exactly like the patterns that you see in tapestry.

"It is impossible to say how much it cost me both in expense and trouble to collect, in four and twenty hours, that enormous quantity of flowers.

"Ursula deigned to shew herself sensible to that proof of attention, she forgave me for the torments that she had made me suffer, and I was once more the most fortunate of men.

"Another evening, in the country, at Auteuil, by a magnificent moonlight, we were speaking of the overture to a new comic opera of Auber's, then much the rage; they praised the harmony of it, which was at once scientific and melodious; Ursula who took pleasure in defying me, said, looking at me.

"What a pity it is that that delicious harmony cannot be wafted from Paris to us, in that feeble breeze which murmurs among the trees in the garden.

"It was ten o'clock, I went out for a moment, I returned, I contrived to detain Ursula and Mademoiselle de Maran there till near twelve o'clock, suddenly came the sound in the distance of this very overture played by the whole orchestra, and wafted to us as

Ursula had expressed her wish, in the feeble breeze which murmured among the trees in the garden.

"This appears like a prodigy to you, nothing could be more simple, the moment Ursula expressed her wish I sent off two of my servants to Paris, they arrived there in twenty minutes, one of them for a considerable sum engaged the leader of the orchestra to come, when the opera had concluded, to Auteuil, with his band, the other got vehicles and post horses to convey them and their instruments, ready at the door of the theatre; the opera was concluded at eleven o'clock, an hour afterwards the whole orchestra was established at Auteuil, and thus I realised another caprice of Ursula's. This time I was hardly thanked: I had accustomed her to so many surprises of the same kind that she was *blasée* to the prodigies that I effected by dint of gold.

"Distracted by so much insolence, ingratitude and harshness, I ventured to recriminate, I spoke to her of the sacrifices of all kinds that I had made, of the wife that I abandoned, of the fortune that I dissipated. Ursula, adopting an air of freezing haughtiness, and profound contempt asked me what I meant, whether I was a man of such extremely bad taste, as to reproach her with a *serenade* or a *bouquet* (alluding to the tapestry of flowers and the invisible orchestra!) as to my other *sacrifices* she did not understand what they consisted in; Mademoiselle de Maran disliking to live alone had proposed to her, Ursula, to come and live with her at the Hotel de Maran, and help her to do the honors. It was, no doubt, a very agreeable abode, thanks to the good arrangements that I had made with Mlle. de Maran's income, but for her, Ursula, what personal obligation could *she* have in it? had she not expressed the greatest indignation to me once, when I ventured to offer her some jewels?

"That was quite true, by one of those inexplicable contradictions, which are so numerous in Ursula's character, I repeat she would have blushed to have accepted a diamond, while she did not hesitate to do the honors of a house of which I sustained secretly the enormous expense, and she never hesitated in involving me, with a kind of malicious joy, in every species of folly, and prodigality.

"At length, when despairing and furious to see myself so treated I reproached her with being my evil genius, Ursula burst into a fit of laughter, and insolently replied—'I warned you always to beware of me if ever I showed you, any other feelings than those of indifference, or contempt, as I might take it into my head, one day, to revenge Matilda, so you see, what I prophesied has come to pass, *I am Matilda's avenger.*'

"The next day, a few words of tenderness from her were sufficient to make me forget her contempt.

"I have tried to account for my inconceivable conduct by attri-

buting it to one of those infatuations of which, one often sees examples, but against my will I am forced to acknowledge, yes! to confess that I believe there is a fatality in this. I am become superstitious, but I tell you that woman will prove fatal to me.

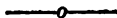
"There is even in her joy, something sombre, and in her influence and fascination something strange.

"Mademoiselle de Maran says to me sometimes—'I never attached myself to any one, no one ever influenced me, and yet now, I could not go on, without that young woman. I know that she is as malicious as a demon, but it makes no difference, it appears to me that the fire of her large blue eyes reflect their brightness on all around me'—Mademoiselle de Maran is right, her eyes are animated by a most extraordinary expression, one would think that the light they reflect, proceeded from some interior illumination—but I must stop, or you will laugh, and accuse me of believing in the devil.

"Adieu, my brain seems on fire, this retrospect of my proceedings these last two years has the effect on me of recalling a frightful dream.

"What do you think of all this? answer me, advise me, pity me,

"G. de Lancry."



## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE MEETING.

AFTER the perusal of that letter, I know not which I felt most, indignation, pity, or contempt for M. de Lancry; if I had still entertained any regret for the past, or any sentiment of hatred against my husband, I should have been cruelly revenged or afflicted.

I could not however help smiling with bitterness in thinking of the sacrifices that my husband was making for a woman who despised him, while he had treated me with the utmost harshness when I begged him to change the situation of his dog kennels, and to grant me a small sum for a work of charity.

What struck me also very much in that letter, was the kind of dread, and weak superstition, that characterized the latter part of it, a bad heart, and proud spirit, are always ready to attribute their faults or their crimes, to fatality, or to some supernatural cause, rather than to the weakness, and perversity of their own nature.

Another trait also worthy of observation, was, to find that

man, who used to be so brilliant, so insolently conceited and happy, so regardless of the tears he caused to be shed, so coldly egotistical, so *blasé* by admiration, to see him, in this love affair, as humble, as much ridiculed as a fool in a comedy, and yet he was young, handsome, rich, and witty! "certainly heaven's vengeance takes all forms"—said I—"I wonder in what manner it will overtake Ursula?"

I could no longer doubt that M. de Lancry was hurrying on fast to ruin, there now only remained to him the price of the estate at Maran, which I had secretly purchased. That portion of my inheritance from M. de Mortagne which became our common property, was also swallowed up. Indifferent as I had become since the death of my child to money matters I was yet cruelly mortified to see my personal property sacrificed to encrease the luxuries of Mademoiselle de Maran and to gratify the unreasonable whims of my cousin.

Unfortunately, my marriage contract was such that I had no power to oppose any resistance to the foolish prodigality of my husband; my only resource would have been a law-suit, to demand a separation; but I could not on any account, have had recourse to such an expedient, and see my name mixed up with all sorts of scandalous stories; I always felt much reserve in my grief, and hardly communicated all I felt even to Madame de Richeville, I could not think of such a thing as making the public the confidant of all my misfortunes.

I resigned myself therefore to bear what I could not remedy; the simplicity of my tastes and habits rendered this sacrifice less painful to me.

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The predictions of Madame de Richeville had not deceived me, her attention, her friendship, the amiability of the guests whom I met so often, with her, soon effaced every trace of my late sadness; and I enjoyed at last a calm which was not oblivion, a repose which was not stupidity; if it was not happiness, it was, at last complete cessation of all suffering.

That transition was full of charms for me, it resembled much that *vague bien être* which succeeds to violent illnesses.

Chance gave me an opportunity of proving that my recovery was complete.

One day that I was out in my carriage in the Bois de Boulogne with Madame de Richeville, I saw two ladies on horseback pass very quickly, accompanied by several gentlemen, It was Ursula, the Princess Ksernika, M. le duc de Versac, M. de Lancry, Lord C—— and two or three others whose names I did not know.

My cousin was mounted on the mare Stella, which had belonged

to us, she rode with her accustomed grace, and boldness ; our carriage was going at foot's pace ; Ursula and my husband recognised me perfectly. My cousin with the greatest effrontery pointed me out to M. de Lancry with a look of mockery ; my husband reddened, but would not appear to notice it.

The cavalcade passed on.

Madame de Richeville watched me with anxiety.

My heart was smitten ; but the impression was rapidly effaced.

In returning to Paris, we saw Ursula, the Princess Ksernika, and the Duc de Versac, returning from the Bois de Boulogne in a charming caleche drawn by four horses and postillions wearing the livery of Mademoiselle de Maran. M. de Lancry followed in a tilbury. At this new trial, Madame Richeville looked again at me. I smiled.

"Come," said she ; "you are completely cured."

This was on a Tuesday, as far as I can recollect. I had taken that day a box at the comic opera with Madame de Richeville ; she had offered places to the Prince and Princess D'Hericourt. We had been arrived some little time, when, by a singular chance, Ursula and Mademoiselle de Maran, accompanied by M. le Duc de Versac entered a box on the same tier with ours.

I had begged Madame de Richeville to place herself in the front with the Princess D'Hericourt, so that, almost hid in the shade, I could, without being observed, watch the following scene.

My cousin, according to her usual custom, was dressed with the greatest simplicity. She had on a white dress ; a zephyre scarf, that hardly shaded her beautiful shoulders, which appeared of the whiteness and polish of marble ; two crimson camillas ornamented her fine brown hair, which fell in ringlets down to her bosom, in her stomacher she had a bouquet of flowers, like those in her hair—this constituted all her ornament.

Jealousy had never blinded me ; I thought Ursula even more beautiful than ever, her features, her carriage, had acquired a shade of dignity, or rather of haughtiness, which atoned for the boldness of her looks and the freedom of her words ; for she had, I was told, acquired with men an incredible licence of language.

Mademoiselle de Maran, always faithful to her Carmelite robe, and her cap trimmed with marigolds, appeared to me much aged, much altered, her eyes alone had preserved their usual vivacity, and glistened with the viper's glance from under their long grey lashes.

Between the acts the box of Mademoiselle de Maran was continually full of visitors, apparently those of the first class in society.

I then saw Ursula in all the pride of her triumph and successes, she had often said that she would be—what she certainly had be-

come, the most sought after, the most fashionable woman in Paris ; her success was complete, for she seemed born for the part that she was now sustaining.

The brilliancy of her expression, her very animated, but always charming gestures, her laugh, so soft and musical, her air of haughtiness, sometimes exchanged for a playfulness, at once piquante and satirical, everything about her announced a long acquaintance with the art of pleasing, and attracting attention.

Amongst the men who gathered round Ursula, I saw Gaston de Senneville, *la fleur des pois*, as his aunt, Madame de Richeville, called him ; my cousin appeared to give him a particularly favourable reception, while another visiter, to their box, of rather a graver character, the *charge d'affaires* of Saxony, was carrying on a conversation with Mademoiselle de Maran.

M. de Senneville often took hold, in a very friendly manner, of the *lorgnette* belonging to Ursula ; he bent over her, and spoke with her in a low tone of voice, joined with her in *eclats* of laughter, followed with his eyes all those whom she pointed out to him, and in short, affected all those signs of intimacy, which a young man is so fond of displaying towards a woman who is much *a-la-mode*.

On her side, my cousin redoubled her coquetry—wishing to make him inhale the superb bouquet that she held in her hand, she threw herself back, and half turned her lovely figure towards M. de Senneville presenting it to him, who of course, appeared to delight in the balmy odours of the flowers. Though that action of Ursula's, was not in the strictest good taste, yet I confess, it was impossible to imagine anything more charming and graceful, than the manner that accompanied it.

By chance, at that moment, I threw my eyes on a box opposite to that of Mademoiselle de Maran, and there I saw the pale and haggard countenance of my husband.

He had placed himself there, without doubt, to watch Ursula, whose attitude and manners were singularly calculated to excite his jealousy. In a few minutes M. de Lancry disappeared, and then made his entré into Mademoiselle de Maran's box, and came forward to pay his compliments to Mademoiselle de Maran. Being a younger man than the *Charge d'affaires* of Saxony, M. de Senneville was obliged to be the one to move, to make room for my husband, which he did, but not before he took some flowers from Ursula's bouquet, and with a smile, triumphantly placed them in his button hole. M. de Lancry appeared in torture ; he exchanged a few words with Mademoiselle de Maran.

After M. de Senneville's departure, Ursula took her *lorgnette* with an annoyed air, and without taking any notice of M. de Lancry she persevered unmercifully in looking about all parts of the house

With it, twice my husband attempted to speak to her, and she either did not hear, or pretended not to hear him ; he was obliged to touch her arm slightly to make her aware of his presence, she then gave him her hand in an absent manner, scarcely spoke a few words to him, and immediately resumed her *lorgnette*.

M. de Lancry could not suppress a movement of impatience and of anger, and began a conversation with the Saxon *Charge d'affaires* and Mademoiselle de Maran.

In the morning, thanks to the rapidity of Ursula's riding, I had hardly seen M. de Lancry, now I had full time to observe that, his haggard countenance and emaciated figure, bore record to the truth, of the sufferings he had described in his letter ; he was no longer, as before, brilliant and playful, because he knew not what love was ; bold and satirical—because he felt certain of pleasing and governing—he was now sombre and uneasy, humble and submissive—because he loved passionately, and was in his turn rallied upon it.

When Ursula became tired of looking about, M. de Lancry again addressed her, but this time, with a sort of timid sadness. I knew enough of the physiognomy of that woman to perceive, by her haughty air, and the smile of raillery that hovered over her lips that she replied by sarcasms to the indirect reproaches of my husband. At last, M. de Versac, came in, the curtain drew up, and the conversation, which appeared so painful a one to M. de Lancry, ceased at the first sounds from the orchestra.

A strong feeling of indignation came across me, when I remembered the frightful despair in which M. Sècherin, insensible to the pious consolations of maternal solicitude, consumed in solitude his days, while his wife, animated gay, and happy, gave herself up, without shame, to the gratification of her taste for gallantry and dissipation.

I made all these observations from the back of the box, where I was sitting, quite out of view, Madame de Richeville and the princesses, guessing my feelings at the sight of Ursula, kept up a conversation together, not to disturb me.

The Prince had left the box, so I was able to give myself up to a train of painful reflections.

That evening, was not without its use to me, it proved to me that I no longer entertained for M. de Lancry, any feeling stronger than the pity mixed with contempt that I should have felt for any stranger placed in such a false and humiliating position. What M. de Lancry was now undergoing reminded me of all that I had suffered. I thanked Heaven that I was emancipated from the horrible sufferings I had endured, even at the price of having the source of all love dried up in my heart, for I founded my hopes of future happiness on the impossibility of ever again experiencing those sensations.

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A few days after my arrival in Paris, M. de Rochegune had set off for one of his estates, where his presence was required, and returned soon after I had witnessed this scene at the Opera. The *souvenir* of M. de Rochegune had remained in my mind intimately connected with that of M. de Mortagne; equally devoted to my interests, of a serious character, and enlightened benevolence, so much deference was paid to him in society, that notwithstanding his youth I had learnt to look upon him as a man of a certain age, for he had all the solid qualities, appertaining to it.

In the midst of my misfortunes, while the fascination exercised by husband over me, was still existing, I used to think and confess it with shame, that had I married M. de Rochegune I never should have loved him passionately, so little did his intrinsic worth, weigh with me, against the seductive charms of M. de Lancry. Madame de Richeville in speaking to me sometimes of M. Rochegune, told me that since his return from the East he had established for himself a position in the world, worthy of the noble independence of his character, instead of shrinking as before into a degree of cold reserve. Impatient to see M. de Rochegune again, from a mixture of grateful recollections, and awakened curiosity, I was delighted to hear of his return to Paris.

One evening about ten o'clock, after traversing a little covered gallery that I had had constructed to connect my pavillion with Madame de Richeville's house I arrived there.

I hardly know why, but, there are some privileged drawing-rooms, the arrangements in which, seem especially to invite sociability and intimacy, that of Madame de Richeville was one of the number. I have spent such happy evenings there, that I cannot refrain from giving a sketch of it.

The ante-room which contained some old and good paintings led to the drawing room where Madame de Richeville usually sat, it was fitted up with green velvet hangings, and carved wood wainscoting, with gold borderings in the best taste of the time of Louis XIV. Near the fire-place was a large sofa on which Madame de Richeville was seated that evening with the Prince D'Hericourt, a tall and handsome old man, with white hair, and an expression of noble calm, and serenity; on the other side of the chimney-piece was the Princess D'Hericourt, whose pale and gentle countenance expressed at once dignity and the most angelic repose; her grey hair was arranged in curls under her cap, with all the coquettishness of old age; even while she was talking with Madame de Sémur, that good Princess could not help watching the Prince D'Hericourt with a solicitude at once tender and gratifying.

I was always affected at the sight of these two old people, who had journeyed on through such disastrous epochs, relying on each other, and verging now to the termination of their long career, with purified minds, a smile on their lips and heaven in their thoughts.

Madame de Sèmur, seated by the side of the Princess offered a striking contrast to her, she was not quite forty, and her countenance at once noble and *piquante*, seemed to unite contradictory expressions, that is great dignity, with the most variable and animated expression, and a brilliant and eccentric wit ; and lastly, near the tea-table placed between the two windows of that drawing room sat Emma, working at her embroidery frame.

To complete this picture, several lamps of China porcelaine shed their brilliant light on all around, shewing to advantage the pictures, Sevres china vases, the bronze ornaments, the glowing colours of the carpet, where flowers seemed scattered over a green surface, the splendid bouquets arranged with taste, in different parts of the room, and as if floating in the air, a peculiar perfume, of which Madame de Richeville was very fond, and which I cannot inhale even now, without recalling, that time, so long since passed away, imagine all this, and you will have some idea of the most charming retreat that had ever been invented for the long and intimate communion of a chosen and select society.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE RECITAL.

WHEN I entered the room, Emma got up to offer me what she called my arm chair ; it was a low seat, which the dear girl had remarked I always preferred, I embraced her, to thank her for that attention, and shook hands affectionately with the Prince D'Hericourt.

"What a pity it is you have arrived so late, my dear Matilda," said Madame Richeville to me—The Prince was relating to us the history of a most valiant action of one of our friends, it would have interested you so much."

"Who was the Hero of it then," asked I ?

"Monsieur de Rochegune—said Madame de Sèmur—he is quite a *Cid*, and deserves a place in the annals of modern romance."

"Come—come—said the Prince, good naturedly smiling at the risk of passing for a *Radoteur*, I will recommence the history of my *Cid* for Madame de Lanery, she will know how to appreciate it."

"And I also—said Madame de Sèmur—just now, I was affected, *malgré moi* ; this time I shall be upon my guard, and shall try to find some fault with your hero, for there is nothing so tiresome as to be obliged always to admire."

"Do you hear her—said Madame de Richeville to the Princess smiling, and she denies that she delights in paradoxes !"

"Why this is very simple," replied Madame de Sèmur—"when one recovers from that kind of enthusiasm one feels like a *bourgeois*,

returned from court. So pray, Prince, be good enough to recommence your recital that I may laugh at your hero at my ease."

"I join Madame de Sémur in begging you will relate to me this gallant action—said I to the Prince, being sure that that trait of *complaisance* will not cost you much. Gallant men are always, they say, glad to repeat any trait of heroism."

"Oh! I understand" said the Prince to me, with a smile—"I understand, you are making me all these fine speeches to prevent my saying all I think of *you*; but if I find the opportunity, I shall be inexorable, you may flatter *my* pride, but I shall not spare *your* modesty. However since you desire it, I will recommence the recital I was making to these ladies.

"You know perhaps ladies—said the Prince de Héricourt, that Rohegune distinguished himself so much in the cause of the Greeks, that he was made Colonel of one of their three regiments of Cavalry, a regiment that he had collected and equipped at his own expense, and to which, from a feeling of friendship towards M. de Mortagne, he gave the same hussar uniform, as belonged to the regiment *he* was in, under the Emperor—that uniform, I believe was, white and gold, with a blue collar, if I dwell on these minute details, it is to prepare you for another mark of remembrance and friendship, no less touching, and which had a noble effect—you will be forced to admire it madame," said the Prince to Madame de Sémur, "and to admire it without regret."

"We shall see—we shall see, for I shall listen to you, Prince, I warn you, with all sorts of defiance—we judge of an advocate, by the cause he defends."

"Let me try then, to gain mine," said the Prince smiling, and he continued. "The independence of Greece being proclaimed and ensured, Rohegune set off for Russia; it was at the time of the war of that country against the Circassians. Perfectly well received by the Emperor, and anxious to assist in the operations going on, Rohegune entered as a volunteer the campaign of *Caucase*, and was severely wounded in a charge of cavalry in which he was foremost. He had his horse killed under him; exhausted by the loss of blood, he could not disengage himself and remained insensible on the field of battle. When he recovered consciousness, a terrible scene presented itself, he found himself alone in the midst of an immense and solitary plain that the moon's pale light imperfectly shewed him, snow was falling slowly, and he was already half buried in his frozen couch, when he recovered from his fainting."

"This is frightful," said Madame de Richeville; "that desert, covered with snow, must have had the effect of an immense winding-sheet. Monsieur de Rohegune has told me, that was the first impression that occurred to him, for he has given me an account of his being wounded before, though he did not tell me the conclusion of this romantic adventure."

“ I believe it,” said the Princess ; “ it redeunds too much to his own honor.”

“ And I only learnt it,” said the Prince, “ yesterday, from an *aid-de-camp* of the Emperor. He was a fellow officer of Rohegune’s in that war, and it is from him, I gained all these details. Our friend, finding himself alone at night, in the midst of a profound solitude, paralyzed by the cold, and his wounds, and hardly having strength to disengage himself from the snow which was accumulating round him, heard at last the sound in the distance of a troop of cavalry ; not knowing whether they were friends or enemies, but preferring even death to the horrible position he was in, he collected all his strength to make himself heard by them in passing by. They approached him, and he was saved. They were a troop of Cossacks who had been as *arriere garde* to the army, irregular troops, as savage as the wild horses which they rode, but they nevertheless paid a blind obedience to the old *Hetman* who commanded them. Rohegune was conducted to this chief of the band, who took him up on his horse, after having bound up his wounds. This Hetman, the *aid-de-camp* told me, was a sort of patriarchal warrior, possessing heroism and courage worthy of a hero of antiquity. Rohegune owed his life to him, and from that day he contracted a friendship for him, as for a brother in arms ; quitting the post that he before held in the army, where he had far less hardships and privations to endure, he henceforth shared the perilous and adventurous life of the soldiers of the Hetman, who sustained all kinds of hardships ; never sleeping under a tent, but on the bare earth or on the snow. This was not all ; they ran still greater risks, as they made war without mercy, almost without prisoners, for they neither gave nor asked for quarter to the Tartars, who followed their example in massacring women, children, and the aged.”

“ Pardon me if I interrupt you,” said Madame de Sèmur, laughing ; “ but I was quite sure that in listening a second time to the valiant actions of your protégé, I should find something less to admire. In his love for adventures he allies himself with a troop of robbers and assassins ; and he remains to witness their atrocities from gratitude.”

The Prince laughed and replied :

“ And it is precisely, madame, apropos of those atrocities of which M. de Rohegune was spectator, that your admiration for him will be excited.”

“ How ?”

The Prince continued :

“ Rohegune, determined not to quit the Hetman till he had rendered him as great a service as he had received from him, and he had not long to wait before an opportunity occurred of acquitting that debt. I forgot to tell you that the Hetman had two sons who served as

soldiers in his troop, he loved them with the same kind of love, as a wolf loves its young; placed them purposely in the front of all kinds of danger, and then, when the action was over, strained them to his breast with a kind of savage joy. The natural intrepidity of Rochegune, the affection shewn him by the Hetman, whose dangers and privations he always shared, acquired for him an immense influence over all the troop. A party that had been sent out to reconnoitre, amongst whom were the two sons of the Hetman, fell into an ambuscade, placed on the borders of a torrent. Almost all the Cossacks were massacred, and the bodies of those who were not were dashed to pieces by the rocks as they floated down, near the camp of the Hetman, on the waters. On learning this misfortune, the old Hetman became stupefied, paralysed. At this moment an *aid-de-camp* of the field marshal (the Russian officer whom I have already alluded to) brought an order to the Hetman to station himself with his troop at a place, that he designated to him. The Hetman mechanically made a sign of acquiescence—full of confidence in that old soldier, and hurried with other orders, the *aid-de-camp* did not think it necessary to wait to see his orders put into execution, but galloped off to another quarter. Rochegune was well acquainted with the art of war; though young, he had had much experience in it; and comprehending the importance of that move, which should be put in execution without a moment's delay, he was astonished at the immoveability of the Hetman; he spoke to him; he reminded him of the orders he had just received; he could not extort a word from him; every moment of delay compromised the safety of the army, and the life of the Hetman, for his inaction merited death. To rouse him from this insensibility which the news of the massacre of his two sons caused in him, Rochegune took a desperate remedy; he said to the Hetman: '*To horse! to horse!*' The old man looked at him and hung down his head. '*It is to search for your sons!*' cried our friend; a ray of animation enlightened the countenance of the Hetman. '*My sons,*' cried he; '*where are they?*' '*Follow me; you will find them,*' said Rochegune, mounting his horse, and directing it towards the quarter the *aid-de-camp* had indicated. '*My sons! my sons!*' cried the old man, mounting his horse. The Cossacks hastened to follow their chief; Rochegune preceded and guided them, accompanied by the old Hetman, crying out '*My sons! my sons!*' '*Follow me!*' replied Rochegune. The enemies' ranks were in sight. Rochegune pointed them out to the Hetman, saying to him, '*Your sons are there.*' The old man, with a cry of rage, fell upon the enemy; a horrible conflict ensued; once in the midst of the fight, the Hetman regained his presence of mind; Rochegune, who never quitted his side, explained to him in two words what had happened; the old man, recovering his *sang froid*,

fought with his accustomed valour. By a wonderful chance, Rochegune, attacking a party of Circassians who were slowly making their retreat, forced them to fly, and to abandon, in their flight, a horse on which two prisoners were strapped."

"The two sons of the old Hetman!" cried Madame de Richeville. "What happiness!"

"Just so, madame," replied the Prince; "they were covered with wounds; the enemy had only spared them to keep them as hostages. You may imagine the joy of Rochegune in bringing back his children to their father, who, at the sight of them, crossed his arms on his breast, knelt down on one knee, and reverently kissed Rochegune's hand. To appreciate the full significance of that action, you must know, that it is to the Emperor alone, that the chiefs of these hordes render that homage, and it was never known amongst them that an old man should kneel to a young one. '*I had saved your life, and you have saved my honor,*' said the old man; '*I ought to save it again in order to be acquitted towards you, since you have restored my sons to me. What can I do to acquit myself?*'"

"These are our friend's own words, as the *aid-de-camp* who had come to compliment the Hetman on the brilliant charge of his Cossacks, repeated them to me:

"*'You and your sons,' said Rochegune, 'swear, to spare the women, children, and the aged, who may fall into your hands, and say to them: "Live in remembrance of——"*'" here the Prince paused.

"What name?" cried they all.

The Prince smiled, and said:

"That is not my secret, suffice it to know, the Hetman and his sons took, and kept the oath. The name that Rochegune pronounced was so little forgotten, I was told, by the Russian officer who terminated the campaign, that, last year, at the close of the war, it was still as sacred to the Hetman, as the oath that he had sworn to our intrepid and generous compatriot."

"This is quite worthy of the old days of chivalry and romance," cried Madame de Sémur, "and to complete the story the name is certainly that of some haughty beauty who——"

"Allow me to interrupt you," said the Prince, with a serious air, "to assure you that that name did, and still does, deserve, to be pronounced with as much interest, as respect, that you know it——"

"That I know it?" cried Madame de Sémur.

"Yes Madame, and it is that of a person whom you love—in short it is a name which deserves in every respect, to serve as a symbol, for a noble action, and Rochegune could not render a more worthy homage to the owner of it."

"How cruel you are," cried Madame de Richeville, "tell it us!"

"That is impossible, madam, you yourself would approve of my silence—if you knew the cause of it—I must not deprive Rochegune of the pleasure of telling it you: but listen, I hear a carriage in the court, perhaps a happy hazard has sent our hero himself; address yourself then to him."

"It is a happy chance if it really is M. de Rochegune," said Madame de Sémur, "chance is so *maladroit* sometimes, that it ought for once at least to——"

The entrance of M. de Rochegune, interrupted Madame de Sémur's speech.

The Eastern sun had so effectually bronzed him, the expression even of his countenance was so totally altered, that I should never have recognized him; his face completely shaved, with the exception of his dark moustachios, which set off the whiteness of his teeth, and vermilion of his lips, gave to his countenance a very decidedly oriental expression, his figure was tall and slim, with that air of truth, and chivalry, about him which reminded one, of the valiant cavaliers, in the portraits of Velasquez, or Van Dyck, while round his lips there played a smile, which nevertheless gave the idea, that on provocation, bitter sarcasm, might possibly replace, the usual benevolent expression which reigned there.

Charmed to meet M. de Rochegune again, I cordially expressed my joy to him, in which he shared; as he spoke to me of the past, a shade of sadness passed suddenly over his countenance; I guessed it was the remembrance of M. de Mortagne, but he did not think it a fit time or place to allude to that dear friend.

"Do you know that you are very deceitful?" said Madame de Richeville to M. de Rochegune.

"How is that, madame?"

"Certainly it is so, you have told me of your being wounded, how you nearly perished in the snow—how you were saved—but that was all—you took care not to say a word about a certain Her-  
man."

"Not to say a word about the immense service you did him in saving his honour," said Madame de Sémur.

"And in restoring to him his sons," added the Princess.

"And in making him promise, himself and his sons that they would spare the women, children, and aged," said Madame de Sémur, "and restore them to liberty for the sake of——"

"Ah! that is the mystery," said Madame de Richeville, "that tiresome Prince will not give us the name, with which you softened the ferocity of these barbarians."

All these reproaches succeeded each other so rapidly that M. de Rochegune had not been able to answer a word; instead of affecting a misplaced and embarrassing modesty, he said frankly, with the utmost simplicity:

"All this is very true ; but Prince, permit me to ask you how you knew——"

"Do not tell him till he has told us this mysterious name," cried Madame de Richeville.

"Look how he blushes," cried Madame de Sémur, laughing.

In truth M. de Rochegune reddened very much, he frankly confessed, instead of denying it.

"Yes I blush," said he smiling, "because I cannot help blushing with gratitude, on hearing that name spoken of, which has always been a happy omen to me, that name—the symbol of a *souvenir* which guided, protected, counselled me, in very important circumstances in my life. Since I first pronounced that name it has become a sort of talisman to me, and I profess the blindest idolatry for it ; for instance, they say I made a good speech in the chamber of Peers to-day, it was because I had previously invoked that name, I am certain."

"But," said Madame de Richeville, "is it not on account of all those wonders, that we are dying to know, whose name it is ?"

"All you say only increases our impatience," said Madame de Sémur.

"Will you tell us," cried Madame de Richeville, "indeed we shall torment you till you clear up this mystery ; the Prince says that we know the person who bears that name, that we love her."

"I should be in despair," replied M. de Rochegune, seriously, "if you could believe, that I fear to repeat that name, the feeling that suggested it to me, is too honourable for me not to glory in it ; but I am sure that the Prince thinks as I do, that at this moment I cannot satisfy your curiosity, if he is of a contrary opinion I will yield to it."

"I have a great mind to beg you to say it," said the Prince smiling, "in order to revenge myself."

"On whom," cried Madame de Sémur, seeing the Prince's hesitation.

"On you, madam," added he gaily, "in making you admire still more, what you praise with regret ; but I will be generous and confess I am of Rochegune's opinion."

"Oh this is frightful ! how they understand each other," cried Madame de Richeville, "so it is no use, we must wait their pleasure, but you shall not be quit of our curiosity, Monsieur de Rochegune, so easily, you must satisfy it in some other way."

"I am at your orders, madam."

"Very well then if you will obey my orders, you will draw for me, from recollection, the portrait of the old Hetman, in Emma's Album."

Emma, before M. de Rohegune could reply, with blushing cheeks placed on the table, her painting box.

"And to punish him for his discretion he shall sing us his Albanian song, of the nightingales," added the Princess.

"Emma shall accompany him; and Madame de Lancry will be delighted to hear it," said the Duchess.

Emma joyously opened the piano with the same graceful *empressment*.

"Which am I to begin with?" asked M. de Rohegune.

"Oh! the song," said the Princess.

Monsieur de Rohegune began it.

It was an Albanian air he had arranged with the words, which he had himself translated; nothing could be more simple, or more melodious, than that harmony.

I had never heard M. de Rohegune's voice before. It was deep, yet soft and harmonious. The song pleased me so much, that I asked him to sing it again, which he did, with the best grace in the world.

Emma accompanied him wonderfully well. This first part of his task accomplished, M. de Rohegune occupied himself with the second; he sat down to the table to draw, and in half an hour had accomplished, in an admirable manner, a sketch of the Hetman, in seppia. I was less astonished at the various and remarkable talents of M. de Rohegune, though I was not aware he possessed them, than at the gracious facility with which he yielded to all the requests that were made to him.

I shall always remember that evening; at the close of it, while the Princess was taking leave of Madame de Richeville, M. de Rohegune asked me if I should be at home the next morning, and would do him the favor to receive him.

"Small as that favor is, that you ask of me," said I, smiling, "I have a great mind in my turn, to annex a condition to it. I am more curious and more obstinate than Madame de Richeville, and I shall have great difficulty in waiting till to-morrow to know that mysterious name, which has incited you to such noble actions."

"And for me, madame, I could not say it—even before your best friends—not on *their* account; they would have applauded me for it, I doubt not—but on *yours*."

"On mine! And why?"

"Why?" replied M. de Rohegune; and then he added with a manner perfectly natural, and as if he were saying the most simple thing possible: "because that name was yours; because that name was *Matilda*."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## AN OLD FRIEND.

WITH the impression still on me, that M. de Rochegune's confession had caused me to feel, I entered my own habitation, restless, disturbed, and annoyed, as if I had suddenly had an avowal of love made to me.

My embarrassment was not caused by the susceptibility of a false prudery, but from the fear, that, in future, my communications with M. de Rochegune, would lose their truth and frankness, instead then, of being agreeable to me, they would become full of *gêne* from the cold reserve that idea, would inspire.

However, after some reflection, I re-assured myself. I remembered the words of the venerable Prince d'Hericourt—knowing that it was *my* name, he was silent, not to alarm my modesty; but he had so openly praised M. de Rochegune in that particular circumstance, he himself had mentioned it with so much frankness and simplicity, that my scruples vanished.

Besides, it was impossible for me to imagine, that M. de Rochegune could think lightly of me; our intercourse had often been under circumstances of peculiar delicacy, and never had such a suspicion of him crossed my mind. He had rendered me most important services; first at the commencement of my married life, in warning me of the odious reports that M. Lugarto was spreading, and endeavouring by his attentions to me, to give colour to; and secondly in helping M. de Mortagne to rescue me from the frightful trap into which that infamous man had betrayed me. On these occasions M. de Rochegune had never swerved from the most perfect reserve, he had never, even alluded, to the hopes he had entertained of obtaining my hand, or the sentiments, that he felt for me.

Soon after that fatal night, in the solitary house of M. Lugarto, he set off for Greece, from thence, he went to Russia, during all those bloody campaigns he had kept up a sort of worship for my name, and for my remembrance, though it was uncertain if he might ever see me again. Could I then be offended at that singular and generous manner of testifying his attachment. I reassured myself also, in thinking that I entertained for M. Rochegune no feeling that approached at 'all to *un tendre penchant*. I admired his fine qualities, his noble character; I had recently discovered also that he was full of talent; I was sincerely grateful to him, for the services that he had rendered me, but I felt the immense difference, that existed, between the affectionate friendship that I felt for him, and the love that I had formerly experienced for M. de Lanery.

Habituated as I had become, to analyze all my feelings and impressions, I questioned myself whether it would not be painful to me at twenty to renounce all love—both from principle, and from the incapability of my heart's feeling it, but far from it, I saw in that very incapability, the foundation of my future happiness.

Since my return to Paris, I had found myself perfectly happy ; the society in which I lived, loaded me with kindness and sympathy. I had Madame de Richeville and Emma to love, so that I had (if I may so express myself,) enough occupation in my heart, not to regret the absence of other feelings. I had forgotten to mention that being at home all the morning, I was in the habit of admitting, very often, Madame de Richeville's friends, who had become also mine, therefore there was nothing unusual in my receiving the visit of M. de Rochegune.

I expected him with impatience. He came the next morning—I was alone ; he held out his hand to me, and said with sadness :

"I could not speak to you last night of our unhappy friend, though we were with those who loved him best in the world, but you must have felt as I did, that it was not the moment to speak of that sad event—ah if you knew all that I have lost in him." And a tear, which Monsieur de Rochegune did not try to hide, rolled down his cheek.

"I also have grieved much for him, and regret his loss more and more—said I, with much emotion—when I think that at his last moments, his thoughts were all of me—oh his was a horrible death, it was an infernal vengeance."

Monsieur de Rochegune frowned, and said with a sombre air : "I have employed every means possible to find out that miserable wretch Lugarto, and to discover the instruments of his base revenge, for I am quite of Madame de Richeville's opinion about that duel, and its fatal issue, I have however been unable to learn any tidings of him further, than, it is said, that he is either in America or the Brazils."

I then told Monsieur de Rochegune of the singular manner in which Monsieur de Lancry's letter had been put in my possession. This struck him, and he told me he would take the necessary measures to find out, if M. Lugarto were not secretly in Paris.

"But do you think he would dare to venture here said I?"

"I fear so, he is too cowardly to fight with me, and I confess I shrink from executing the terrible threat that M. de Mortagne held out to him."

"Yes! *he* would have shrunk himself from that extremity."

"I do not know that : his character was so very firm. But what increases the audacity of Lugarto is that his crimes have never been proved, he could put himself under the protection of the laws and brave the scandal of a trial for the attempt to carry you off."

"I would never consent cried I, to have so many ignominious questions attached to my name ; that terrible *past*, is now to me like a painful dream, and everything that could recall it to me as a reality, would inspire me with horror."

"You are right ; leave to us the care of watching over you, forget the past, oh ! we will try to make you forget it, by every kind of care and attention. Mortagne left you to Madame de Richeville, to me, to all, in short, who can appreciate goodness, we must all try to be to you, what he would have been himself, and to prove to you, that there are still some good hearts left in the world : poor lady ! how much you have suffered, you have met with so many infamous, and degraded characters, that you desire nothing more, than to be able to believe in, and to let us love you, is it not so ?"

I cannot describe with what simple and touching cordiality M. de Rochegune pronounced those words.

"How good you are," answered I, "and how much gratitude I already owe you—have you not already——"

"Oh do not talk of what you owe me," said he, interrupting me, "I also owe to you many gentle—many tender thoughts."

I could not repress a slight movement of embarrassment.

M. de Rochegune comprehended it, and said smiling :

"Here is a comparison which will make you understand me, I should be in despair if you took this for mere gallantry. You like fine pictures, statues, and music do you not ?"

"Without doubt."

"You can understand the feeling which could make one stand for hours contemplating 'The Transfiguration,' 'The Passion,' or 'The Virgin and child ?"

"Certainly."

"You can understand listening with pleasure, with gratitude to Mozart, Gluck, or Beethoven. You confess that the *chefs d'œuvres* of art inspire the highest feeling of admiration ?"

"I do."

"Well then, those feelings of admiration, I bestow on an adorable *chef d'œuvre* of nature. The last wishes of my father, those of M. de Mortagne, the pious respect that your griefs inspire, all augment the passionate worship that I have long vowed to you : you are become, in my eyes, the link between what is human, and what is divine, since I have known you all my best feelings and inspirations have been derived from you, and in joining your name and remembrance with my best actions, it was no flattery that I addressed to you, but a debt that I acquitted towards you."

"You have however other souvenirs, besides mine to invoke," said I, to change the course of this conversation which, was becoming embarrassing to me. "The admirable man who brought you up in such noble sentiments."

"My father! he foresees what you would become—his hopes were, that we should be united," gravely replied M. de Rochegune, "to think of him, is to think of you—the remembrance of him, sanctifies the attachment that I feel for you—reassure yourself therefore, and above all, do not suppose me capable of making gallant speeches in order as it is vulgarly called 'to make love to you.' 'To make love to you'—one does not make love to such a woman as you—as soon as you are known, you are loved as you deserve to be loved—that has always been so with me."

"Monsieur de Rochegune."

"That avowal cannot offend you, ought not even to surprise you."

"How?"

"When you understand what I desire to be towards you, and what I wish you to be towards me, you will thank me for that confession."

"Really sir?"—said I, unable to repress a smile at his enthusiasm.

"And you will be happy in it."

"Happy?"

"And proud of it?"

"Proud of it?" well this is charming, go on, I listen to you."

"Nothing is more simple. You are a courageous woman, as jealous of your honor as a man could be of his; you are incapable of committing a fault, as much from the strength of your principles, as from the conviction that that fault would have the appearance of a base retaliation, and would afford the shadow of an excuse for the unworthy conduct of your husband. Is it not so?"

"It is true, I have never thought otherwise."

"You see I lay much stress on the elevation of your sentiments, understand them, I share in them, but you are only twenty, you have before you, a long and isolated life, without family ties, without connections. At present the friendship of Madame de Richeville suffices to you, you are in a state of transition, and you mistake the cessation of suffering, for happiness, that negative kind of state cannot last: your heart will awaken, you will love."

"I interrupted Monsieur de Rochegune. "You have, said I—till now spoken with truth and reason, but on this last assertion I must disagree with you. I shall love no more—a fatal, but violent passion has destroyed all love for ever in my heart."

"Destroyed all love in your heart?" cried he—"why you have never loved."

"I have never loved."

"Never."

"Come, Monsieur de Rochegune let us speak seriously, for now we are falling into the foolish paradoxes of Madame de Sémur."

"I speak seriously, I repeat it, you have never loved."

"But sir."

"But Madame—God has not willed that the first unworthy

object who presented himself, should have had the power of exciting and then destroying for ever, in such a heart as yours, that most divine of all the sentiments, which engrosses all the finer feelings of the soul.

I regarded Monsieur de Rochegune with astonishment, and I replied :

"What ! you say that I have never loved ? What then have I felt—and why this lethargy of my heart, and death of all my hopes ?"

You have mistaken the exhaustion of suffering, for the lethargy of your heart. "Your heart is *not* lethargic, neither can you renounce all hope when you have nothing to regret."

"Nothing to regret, sir ?"

"No ! you have much to deplore, but happily you have nothing to regret : the future therefore is all before you."

"The future ?"

"Yes ! the future, why not, who shuts it out ? If you were to tell me that a passion, at once, great profound, noble, generously returned, suddenly broken up by some unforeseen event, left in the soul eternal regrets which extinguished future hopes, I would believe you. Yes those regrets would be eternal, because their cause was pure : eternal, because instead of stifling them you would religiously preserve them : eternal, because you would find your only consolation in them : because the happiness that is lost, is irreparable. But that pious fidelity to the past, would it prove that love was extinguished in the heart ; on the contrary, it would prove that it had never burnt with a more pure and ardent flame. Well, have you felt anything resembling this ? No ! doubtless, after having suffered terribly, you fly with horror from all remembrance of your sufferings. You thank God for having delivered you from your martyrdom, poor and unhappy woman."

"That is true—far from wishing to indulge in *souvenirs* of the past—I fly from the recollection of them ; but fatal, and even degrading, if you will, as my love has been, it was not the less *love*, without that, I should never have married M. de Lancry."

"The heart is sometimes deceived, as well as the senses ; the personal attractions of your husband, his gentle but hypocritical manners, the natural desire that you felt to escape from the tyranny of your Aunt, your ingenuous confidence in a man whom you believed to be loyal and true, your own generosity, the entire want of comparison with others, all combined to push you on to a marriage unworthy of you ; once married, once unhappy, you mistook your blind obedience to the will of your husband for the noble devotion of love, you were virtuous, resigned—and you believed yourself to be passionately in love."

"But did I not feel all the tortures of jealousy?"

"It is a continued chain of misconceptions from the beginning. You were as much mistaken about your jealousy, as you were about your love."

"I was mistaken?"

"The ingratitude of your husband revolted you more than his infidelity."

"But why could I not love M. de Lancry?"

"Because he was not worthy of you."

"Do you then think that we love only those who are really worthy of us?"

"I think that you, Matilda de Maran, would really love none, but a person worthy of you."

"But take M. Secherin for an example; he is as good, as his wife is the reverse; she has shamefully betrayed him, and yet he still adores her."

"I am not speaking of M. Secherin; I am not generalizing, I speak individually of you, and I say that you could not really love any one unworthy of you."

"But why me more than any other; why should I feel differently?"

"Because love, in you, as in all elevated minds, can exist only in reciprocity of sentiments."

"Your reasons are specious, and vanity might come to ones aid in order to bring conviction," said I to M. de Rochegune; "but I am not convinced."

"You will be!"

"But why will you insist in convincing me that I have never really loved, and that I ought to love some one worthy of me?"

"I wish to bring home that conviction to you, in order to make you happy and proud of my confession, as I have already told you."

"Explain yourself."

"In proving to you that you have never loved, that you can never love any but one worthy of you; I bring you necessarily to confess that you *will* love one of these days."

"I do not confess any such thing, how do you know I shall meet with a man worthy of me, or if I do, that I shall love him?"

"Everything assures me of it; it is one of the consequences of your position, but your character, your principles are such, that when you love, you will not only avow your love, but you will glory in it in the face of all the world."

"Such a love is rare!"

"And the men worthy of inspiring it, are rarer still, so I tell you, when you meet with one of those men, you will be forced to love him, everything will combine to make you; the yearning of

your own heart, the pride of being loved in that manner, the mysterious ties which draw together superior souls."

"But that man?"

"Well, that man, if you like, shall be me."

"You?"

"I say so, because I believe I am worthy of you."

"From any one else such an assertion would be the height of assurance," said I gravely to M. de Rochegune, in holding out my hand to him, "but from you—I believe you—you are right, I am happy and proud of that avowal."

"I told you so," replied he, with inconceivable simplicity.

"I will imitate your frankness," said I to M. de Rochegune. "It is possible that my heart may be roused. If ever I feel for you a love, such as you have described, a love that we may both be proud of—then—I swear to you I will give myself up to it with happiness, with security; but alas! the purest and the holiest love, is it ever safe from the calumnies of the world?"

"I do not intend to become the champion of the world, but I must say that the harm it does, is almost always caused by the dissimulation or the weakness of those who complain of it. When the conscience is not clear, there is a want of courage, if on the contrary you entertain a sentiment of which you may be proud, that you may avow in the face of any one, why should you try to hide it—if you did, it would be an unworthy action and you would deserve to be calumniated. Why should not virtue be as cold, as vice is audacious—why should not such a woman as you, and such a man as I am, courageously acknowledge our pure and virtuous love, as well as your husband and Ursula who parade before the world their double adultery. The world admires firmness, and if the good were as determined and as resolute as the bad now are, the world would prefer the virtuous, I am certain."

I was charmed with the expression of noble arrogance that animated the countenance of M. de Rochegune as he said this.

"You are right," said I, carried away by sympathy with his generous feelings, "and I am going to give you a proof of my frankness in asking what may appear a strange question. Why did you not speak to me, as you are speaking now, three years ago?"

"Because three years ago I was younger, and did not feel sufficient confidence in myself to speak to you in that manner. Mortagne knew of my love, and he strongly advised me to quit France, to travel, to engage in a noble cause, to render myself useful, in short, to acquire such an empire over myself as would *degager l'or de ses scories*, in other words, to purify my love till I could offer it to you without a blush."

"And if, when you returned, you had found me consoled for the abandonment of my husband, and loving a heart worthy of mine?"

"Disinterested and elevated feelings rise above those trials, which are so painful to self-love ; under such circumstances I should still have said to you all that I have now said, and that also, in the presence of the loved one, for *he* whom you would love must have been capable of appreciating my conduct."

"And if I had loved a man unworthy of me?"

"That could not be ; there are impossibilities in the moral as well as in the physical world. I repeat it to you, you can never love but where you would not blush to do so."

"But if it *were* otherwise, obstinate man?"

After regarding me for an instant in silence, M. de Rochegune said to me, with a solemn expression that gave great weight to his words :

"I SHOULD THEN DOUBT MYSELF."

\* \* \* \*

So ended this first and singular conversation that I had with M. de Rochegune.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE CONFIDENCE.

I REMAINED sometime before I experienced (if I may so express myself) the *Contre Coup* to my last conversation with M. de Rochegune, there was so much frankness and truth in his character that I did not think it necessary to assume the degree of reserve towards him that his avowal would otherwise have created. I continued to see him almost every evening at Madame de Richeville's, and very often in the morning at my own house.

I felt such perfect confidence both in him and myself that I gave myself up, without fear, to the charm of a growing affection, I did not conceal it, I was proud of the proofs of attachment that M. de Rochegune had shown, and of the ennobling influence that I had exercised over his life ; his preference for me, and (why should I not add it) my preference for him since, our affection was such as we had no cause to blush for, was so well understood in the society collected by Madame de Richeville, that they would have made a scruple of depriving M. de Rochegune of the pleasure of offering me his arm, or seating himself next me, and that amiable toleration from people of known strictness proved in what an honourable light, our attachment was considered.

I felt a most tender friendship for Madame de Richeville, every

day she loaded me with fresh proofs of her goodness, I loved Emma, as if she was my younger sister, so that I had never felt more happy.

I enjoyed so much this kind of life, so calm and sociable, that I had not yet consented to go to balls.

In order to make you comprehend what I am now going to relate, I must mention (what I could easily have forgotten) that M. Gaston de Senneville, nephew of Madame de Richeville, had paid me some attentions ; conceiving that the friendship which existed between me and M. de Rochegune was entirely fraternal, there appeared to him to be every possible chance, of inspiring in me more tender sentiments. He was young, not more than twenty, I had received him with friendship for the sake of his aunt, and because I never should have suspected him of any *pretensions* of the kind ; he had only shown towards me those attentions which men ought always to practise towards women, though indeed they have become so rare, and men generally show so few of them to women, that a slight degree, is sufficient, to create remarks.

It required however the scene that I am going to relate to enlighten me as to the nature of M. de Senneville's.

Madame de Richeville came to me one morning and said as she embraced me :

" I am overjoyed, you are the heroine of such a scene ! there is good in the world yet ; it will make up to you for all you have suffered it appreciates you—it will do you justice."

Madame de Richeville appeared so much excited, that I said smiling :

" Pray explain yourself, and tell me how I can have become the heroine of a scene, without having an idea of it myself.

" I am going to tell you and to make you blush,—yes blush, for your praises were not spared, but the charming part of the story is, that it was a *sottise* of my nephew Gaston de Senneville which inspired M. de Rochegune with so much eloquence, and—but I must tell you from the beginning : you know that I went last night to Madame de Longprè's, the Prince and Princess D'Hericourt accompanied me ; it is needless to tell you that her house is open to all Paris. I must name some of the guests to you—a few minutes after us, arrived M. de Rochegune, then, my nephew, Gaston de Senneville, with a superb cravat and *bouquet ravissant* in his button-hole and presenting himself with that easy assurance and studied grace, which makes you laugh—and distresses you.

" Yes I am a good aunt, and do not like to see him make himself ridiculous ; but to proceed, amongst others there was Madame de Ksernika and her brute of a husband, which I was rejoiced at, you will know why : there was the Austrian Ambassador which I was also rejoiced at, though from a different cause, as he is a person on

whom nothing that is delicate or elevated is lost ; in short there was all the *élite* of Paris, and I was delighted to think that they were the witnesses of the scene I am going to relate to you."

"Pray tell it me, for I am dying with impatience."

Madame de Richeville continued.

"M. de Rochegune was talking to Madame de Longpré ; the last concert that we were at together was mentioned, and some one asked me if you were a good musician, it was apropos of that, the conversation turned on you ; certainly, answered I, and it is very unfortunate for the friends of Madame de Lancry that she is so extremely timid ; for it deprives them of the pleasure of hearing her. She has excellent taste and much execution. The first time I heard Madame de Lancry speak—said M. de Rochegune—I was certain that she must sing well, the tone of her voice is so musical that singing can hardly be called a talent with her, it is only a language that is natural to her. Madame de Ksernika, who no doubt cannot forgive you my dear Matilda for the harm she has done you, smiled maliciously, and said in a low voice to M. Rochegune wishing doubtless to embarrass him :

" ' You are a great admirer of Madame de Lancry ?'

" ' Yes ! madam, but I love her still more tenderly than I admire her,' said M. Rochegune, in a voice so firm, with so frank, respectful, and passionate a manner, that notwithstanding its singularity, that confession appeared perfectly *convenable*.

"I know better than any one the worth of M. de Rochegune," said I to Madame de Richeville and blushing, "and before you and our own friends I admire the frankness of his attachment for me—but with others whose kindness is not so well known—"

"You are unjust, my dear Matilda, the conclusion of this scene will convince you that your friend acted perfectly right ; Madame de Ksernika took up the word *tenderly*, and said to M. de Rochegune. "At least you are very indiscreet, do you know that it is a sort of declaration you have made, and that it might come to the ears of Madame de Lancry."

" ' What ! do you suppose, madame,' said M. de Rochegune, ' that I have not long since declared to Madame de Lancry that I love her passionately.'

"Madame de Ksernika put on an air of astonishment, cast down her eyes, then raised them with an expression of alarmed modesty and at last said—' I am in despair at having by a mere *plaisanterie* provoked from you an answer, the consequences of which may prove fatal to the reputation of Madame de Lancry. M. de Rochegune would not let her continue ; he said with the most natural manner possible.' And why should the reputation of Madame de Lancry suffer from what I have said ? ought not one to be proud of the love and admiration that one feels for her ? Is it not right

to be alive to everything that is noble and good? ought one to dissimulate one's enthusiasm because it is excited by a young and charming woman possessing a great and noble soul?"

"Oh no," replied Madame de Ksernika, with her perfidious smile, "only that enthusiasm might induce ill-natured people to believe that the person who inspired it, was not insensible to it."

"It is all that I desire; that those ill-natured persons should be the first to be convinced that the person who inspires it is *not* insensible to it," cried M. Rochegune, throwing at Madame de Ksernika a look of severe contempt, "if by any chance you know any of them Madame do me the favour to tell them that Madame de Lancry is aware of the profound love that she has inspired, that she entertains a sincere attachment for me, that I see her every day, and that I know of no happiness to be compared with that which that charming intimacy brings me."

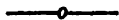
"M. de Rochegune by avowing so proudly, and so openly, his intimacy with you, destroyed the opportunity Madame de Ksernika desired of throwing an air of mystery around it; perplexed and silenced, she called to her aid my nephew Gaston de Senneville who it appears had declared himself to be an admirer of yours, and wished it to be believed that you did not frown upon his pretensions."

"Why M. de Senneville has never said a word to me that could lead me to suppose," cried I, "that—"

"My dear child, I am quite convinced of that," said Madame de Richeville, interrupting me, "and you will see how my nephew was punished for his conceit; the frank confession of M. de Rochegune had already made him feel very ill at ease, as you may imagine; he became crimson; Madame de Ksernika said to him, with an air of mockery, 'Well! Monsieur de Senneville what you think of Monsieur de Rochegune's ideas of discretion? My unhappy nephew does not shine in quick repartee, he was obliged however to say something, in order not to appear like a fool; and you will see he did not gain much by breaking silence, he replied with a sententious air to Madame de Ksernika—' I think, madame, that M. de Rochegune does not appear to appreciate the *mystery* of love, and I cannot agree with him, there is so much charm in darkness—in twilight that'—and here Gaston stopped, finding it impossible to finish his sentence, his voice failed him, he stammered, he coughed; all eyes were fixed upon him, Monsieur de Rochegune pitied him, and replied with a sort of paternal affability, and an animation that increased as he went on—' I assure you, my dear monsieur de Senneville that I comprehend all the value of mystery and shade—for example, for doubtful beauty, or one, beginning to fade, or to cover a base and unworthy attachment; but cannot you comprehend when it is question of beauty as pure as light (it is of Madame de Lancry's that I say that) added he, with a look of scorn at Madame

de Ksernika—when it is question of an attachment, which forms the pride and happiness of those who feel it (it is of my love that I speak now) to bring forward that beauty, and that love, I know of no light too brilliant ; in comprehending the enjoyments of such an attachment, the heart proud of it, the countenance beaming with it, the eye not shrinking from it, to the dark, disgraceful, and cowardly intrigues which shun the light ; you might as well compare the eagle to the owl, the soldier to the assassin, or honour to infamy. I appeal to you, madame, yourself, must you not confess, that at this moment I am much happier in being able to proclaim the name of the woman that I love, *publicly*—than I should be in being forced to hesitate with blushes, or profane it by my impudence—You cannot imagine my dear Matilda,” continued Madame de Richeville with exultation, “the admirable expression of M. de Rochegune’s countenance, while he thus spoke, nor can I describe to you the impression that it caused ; it was electrical, every one, even Gaston and Madame de Ksernika herself partook of the chivalrous enthusiasm of M. de Rochegune ; it was one of those moments so rare, when all hearts seem to beat in unison. Nor was this all, the Prince D’Hericourt, whose opinion has so much weight on matters of principle and honor, exclaimed, taking M. de Rochegune’s hands in his, ‘It is well, my friend, you have ably defended an attachment in which there is no shade to cause a blush ; may your example be followed, and that noble and unfortunate woman be as much appreciated as her worthless deserter is despised ; nor God nor man can blame you. But it is in vain to endeavour, my dear Matilda, to do justice to this scene, which had for spectators all the elite of Paris ; only tell me, can you still blame M. de Rochegune for his indiscretion ?’

“No, certainly not,” cried I, taking the hand of Madame de Richeville, “for I owe to that indiscretion one of the happiest moments of my life.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

SOME days after the conversation that I have just related, I received two more of M. de Lancry’s letters, in the same mysterious manner as before.

These letters, addressed to the same unknown person, were accompanied by a bouquet of the poisonous flowers, the symbol of M. de Lugarto.

M. de Lancry a——

Paris, March, 1834.

“ Everything goes wrong with me ; I am almost mad with rage and shame. I do not know if you have ever met with a Marquis de Rochegune, quite an original, very rich, a great philanthropist, as his father was before him, ridiculously romantic, but not wanting in intelligence, and a speaker in the Chamber of Peers ; one day for his friends, another day against them, just as his principles actuate him ; to conclude, a man without elegance, does not game, or know how to spend his fortune, and for his appearance, rough and devoid of charms, yet women are such extraordinary beings that it is said in Italy, Spain, and even in Paris he might have had more adventures than he has any ambition of having. After travelling for two or three years he has come back this winter to Paris ; his features are extremely bronzed by the Eastern sun, and his dark mustachios give him somewhat the air of an Italian bravo, but the world, with its usual stupidity, has become quite engrossed with this philosopher, and at this moment nothing is thought of but him.

“ If you wish to know why I dwell so much on his description, it is simply because M. de Rochegune is *my wife's lover* : do not take this quite *a la lettre*, since I am also of the same opinion as the most moral, the most religious, and the most strict people in Paris, who have taken this fine attachment under their especial patronage, and declare that my wife is quite authorised to enjoy openly and in peace, the chaste delights of a platonic love with M. de Rochegune, as they vote me a miserable wretch abandoning my wife to live with my mistress in open adultery.

“ Who do you think became my public accuser, and the champion of my injured wife ? The old Prince D'Hericourt ; he employs his influence, which is great, to support a new eccentricity on the part of M. de Rochegune, who took it into his head one night to declare before all Paris, that he was passionately in love with my wife, and that she returned his attachment, and it was in all honor, &c., &c..

“ You know that fashion is everything in Paris, so for the moment it has become the rage to espouse what they call the chivalrous devotion of M. de Rochegune ; the women lose their heads about him, and the men are jealous and afraid of him ; Madame de Lancry is cited as an admirable model of virtuous passion ; and platonic love, with its innocent consolations, is become all the rage. Notwithstanding all this, I am sometimes tempted to look upon M. de Rochegune as the greatest *roué* that I know. Nothing could be more convenient than that new method of conducting an

intrigue, openly and frankly declaring a woman to be the most virtuous of her sex, and under cover of that chaste mantle laughing at the good people who are fools enough to believe it.

"But—no, no ; I know my wife ; either she is most inconceivably altered, or my name remains *sans tâche*, as far as she is concerned. Rochegune also is sufficiently original to find something piquant in that ethereal kind of love, so that on the whole I should not trouble myself much about the matter, if the opinion given by the old Prince D'Hericourt had not so much weight ; but it cannot be denied that he is considered quite an oracle, and he has so exposed the baseness (as he calls it) of my conduct towards my wife, saying that society ought to avenge Madame de Lancry, that I find I am looked coldly upon. Rivals who envied me, fools whose self-love I had wounded, young women whom I had deceived, ugly ones whom I had disdained, have all caught up the opinion expressed by the Prince, so that for some days past I perceive that I am received, when I go into the world, with a constrained silence, and freezing politeness, a thousand times more hard to bear than positive insult, since I can find no pretext to express my anger at it.

"If the Prince D'Hericourt were not an old man, I should have gone to the source of the mischief, and I should have insulted him, but as it is, it is useless to think of it. There remains only Rochegune, and twenty times a day I am tempted to fight him ; but I fear the ridicule that would fall on that duel ; as they would say that my jealousy had caused it. Nevertheless I long to kill that man, for I execrate him ; I have had an antipathy to him, ever since I have known him ; he was the friend of Mortagne, who no longer lives to be detested by me : before my marriage I thought him insupportable from his affectation of secret charities, and mysterious acts of benevolence ; but at least he had not then assumed the insolent and imperious character that he now parades.

"The other day I met him—he was on horseback—so was I ; the blood mounted into my face ; I hoped he would not bow to me, and then perhaps I should have been fool enough to make that the ground of a quarrel ; curses on him, he *did* bow to me, but his bow was one of those indescribable insults, which one can feel keenly without being able to explain why ; I thought I read upon his harsh and immovable features that he bowed only to the man whose name Madame de Lancry bears, or perhaps he felt he was bowing to the husband of his mistress, for after all I am a great fool to believe in the virtue of my wife.

"But no, once more no ; I cannot really believe she is culpable, she would never have energy enough to commit a fault ; she would cry and groan but to revenge herself—never ; on reflection I am better pleased to believe in her virtue, though I have no love for her, yet perhaps it might prove more painful to me than I think ;

were I to know she was guilty, it would be an additional wound to my self-love.

"What provokes and irritates me, to the greatest degree is, that no one seems to throw any ridicule on Rochegune, under circumstances which would involve any one else either in blame or ridicule ; for if he is in earnest with his platonic love, he deserves indeed to be laughed at ; if he is only making a *ruse*, he is clever to have enlisted all those on his side, whom he has ; in either case the man is a problem ; but whatever he may be, I hate him, I cannot express to what a degree I hate him : especially latterly—it appears as if I had some presentiment that he is destined to do me some great injury, that he will wound me in the tenderest part.

"But after all, why should I not come to the point at once, with you, since I write to you, in order to relieve my mind ; well then, I must tell you that ever since, either directly or indirectly, that man has been the cause of the cold reception I have met with in the world, Ursula has become perfectly untractable as regards me. I do not know whether she felt humiliated by the coldness that was shewn towards me, or whether her self love suffered for us both, but she had the insolence to say to me that I deserved the treatment I had met with, for my odious conduct towards my wife ; that the feeling evinced by society towards me was very praiseworthy, and that it would be a good thing if that sort of vengeance was oftener manifested towards those crimes and vices which escape the laws.

"But, cried I—stupified by such audacity—are you not attacked as well as me, insulted as I am ?

"And do you hear me complain—replied she—the world is just. I was determined, at whatever price, to become a woman of the world, to lead the fashion and be the idol of its fêtes—all that I have accomplished—It is supposed that it was from love that I took you from your wife, and I am odious in consequence, they are right, but if they knew that I had never loved you, I should be still more odious in their eyes ; and yet they would still be in the right.'

"Ursula has accustomed me to so many speeches of that sort, to so many caprices, that I should not have attached much importance to those words had not she become, for some time past strangely silent, out of spirits, and apparently plunged in deep reflections.

"I dare not confess, even to you, all the follies I have been guilty of, in order to endeavour to drive away the sombre melancholy into which she seems to be fallen—everything has been in vain ; now she refuses to come down to Mademoiselle de Maran. That woman who felt the influence of her fascinations, is equally unable to cause her the slightest distraction. Ursula accosts her, sometimes with indifference, sometimes with disdain ; she passes whole days alone, either reading or meditating ; her *femme de chambre*

who is in my pay, tells me that her mistress must be under the influence of some profound grief; that she should no longer recognise her—that she walks up and down her room for hours in the greatest agitation, and then throws herself on a seat, hiding her face in her hands. In truth I find her much altered; she is thinner, and she has lost that bloom which was one of her striking beauties, her eyes look hollow, and for this month past I have never heard one of those charming laughs which were so frequent with her, and were at once so admired yet so dreaded.

“Through what caprice I know not, but often she chooses to remain in complete darkness; she will then receive no one. When I first perceived those symptoms of *tristesse* the cause of which, I was ignorant of, I hoped that grief would soften her inflexible character; while she was happy and gay I had thrown away gold in prodigality to gratify the smallest of her caprices. Sad and melancholy, I would have offered her for consolation the treasures of a love, full of delicacy and passion, treasures which I had hoarded at the bottom of my heart, and had hardly dared to disclose to her, so much had I dreaded her accustomed raillery—

“I said to myself, at last the moment is come when perhaps you will be able to gain the ascendancy by the most devoted tenderness; alas! no—she escapes me still—on my knees before her, bathing her hands with tears (for that woman makes me cry like a child) in vain I implore her to tell me what afflicts her, what is the cause of her sufferings that I may share in them, may try to console her. Weeping at the feet of that woman I have felt what I never felt before, my grief was profound, I suffered because *she* suffered, my entreaties came from my heart, my tears were the bitter tears of despair; yet that woman remained unmoved, indifferent, sombre, as if she neither heard or understood me.

“But she must be either stupid or mad not to perceive how I love her! she does not know the value of a heart that can always be relied on, she does not know how rare a thing it is, to inspire such a passion as she has inspired me with, she does not know that criminal as my love may be, it is yet a crime to throw it to the winds—she does not look forward to the future, she does not reflect that the day must come when her youth and her beauty will be nothing but a *souvenir*, and that then she will be too happy to claim that affection she disdains at present, that affection which may be well eternal, since it has already survived her caprices, contempt and ingratitude—but I must stop—all this is frightful, I am mad with rage both against her and myself—I cannot continue this letter—anger and grief blind me.

.....  
“Paris,

It was impossible to continue my letter yesterday, I return to it to day, fresh events have happened, and I hope my ideas will become

more clear as I write to you for my head is in such a state of chaos, that my thoughts chase each other without order and without consistency.

"Let me try to state what has occurred—yesterday, after having interrupted myself in my letter, I went to see Ursula; they told me she was ill, and could admit no one; three times I tried at her door and found it impossible to gain admittance. I went there again this morning, what was my astonishment when Mademoiselle de Maran informed me that Ursula had sent to tell her, that she wished to quit the Hotel de Maran, and live in future, alone. Without waiting to hear further I ran to Ursula, in vain her *femme de chambre* endeavoured to prevent my entering, I made my way in by force, and found her arranging some papers in her writing desk. Is this true?—cried I in my distraction, without saying to *what* I was alluding: she looked at me with a sombre and an absent air and then asked me,

"What do you mean?"

"Mademoiselle de Maran tells me that you intend to quit her hotel—that is impossible."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, while she continued to arrange her papers:

"It is possible, because that is the case."

"That shall not be," cried I quite beside myself; "I forbid you—that shall not be."

"You forbid me—and that shall not be! and pray what right have you to speak to me in that manner, sir?" answered she, regarding me with haughtiness.

"Legitimate or not, I have some claims upon you, and I will not give them up."

"And how will you establish those claims, sir?"

"I tell you that I shall not allow you to quit this house, or if you do, I will accompany you wherever you go," cried I.

"I *shall* quit this house sir, and you will *not* accompany me."

"Come, Ursula, do not exasperate me, I will tell you in two words why you and I must not quit each other; I have sacrificed for your sake, my wife, I am almost dishonoured in the eyes of the world, you see therefore we must not think of separating; we are chained together, whatever my fate may be you shall share it; you understand me, do you not?" said I, enraged, for the unmoved *sang froid* with which she listened to me put me almost beside myself. She answered me with a look that seemed as if she would penetrate to my soul, and without withdrawing her eyes from me:

"I will tell you in two words why we must never have any further connection together. No one has any rights or claim upon me, I shall quit this house whenever it pleases me to do so, and if you try to prevent me, although there is nothing more vulgar than

such a proceeding, I shall appeal to the law to be protected from your pursuit."

"You will appeal to the law—you will have recourse to the police, without doubt," cried I, in a fit of convulsive laughter, when as my eyes mechanically looked around the room, I was struck by seeing a domino of black satin on the sofa.

A ray of light, excited by jealousy, burst on my mind. I remembered that the evening before was the *jour de la Miséricorde*, seizing the domino I shewed it her.

"You were last night at the ball at the opera," cried I, "notwithstanding your pretended melancholy, notwithstanding your sufferings."

"I was at the ball at the opera last night, notwithstanding my sufferings, notwithstanding my pretended melancholy," replied she, "that proves to you, I hope, that my desire to go to it must have been very strong."

"I see it all—I understand it all," cried I; "you love some one; you have an intrigue and a lover; but by all that is sacred, the person you so boldly went to meet shall not escape alive from my hands; and now I install myself here, and I shall not budge," cried I, seating myself on the sofa.

"As you will, sir," said she; and then, without appearing to be aware of my presence, she continued her occupation.

This *sang froid*, this indifference, exasperated me; I tore the papers out of her hands, and threw them into the middle of the room. She looked at me with an unmoved expression, shrugged her shoulders, and made an attempt to leave the room.

"I seized her rudely by the arm,

"You shall not quit this room—cried I—you shall not move till you have told me why you went to the ball at the opera last night without letting me know, suffering as you are—for you are pale and much altered. Unhappy woman said I, unable to conceal my tenderness and my tears at the sight of her altered countenance, what imperious motive could have carried you to that ball—answer—

"Without saying a word she gently disengaged herself from my grasp, I was before the door and barred the passage; she sat down, lent her arm against the sofa, and with her chin resting on her hand, remained mute and immoveable. I humbled myself once more before her, I said everything that the most devoted passion could inspire, the blindest adoration, the most genuine despair—prayers, tears, sighs, all were in vain, all failed to touch that heart of marble, determined at all risks to make her break a silence that exasperated me I had recourse to reproaches, to threats—all in vain—not a word.

"One would have taken her for a statue, she did not even seem to hear, she seemed so engrossed with her own thoughts, once or twice a slight and sad smile hovered on her lips and she made a

slight movement of her head, as if she were answering some interior reflection.

"In despair I went down to Mademoiselle de Maran. Always egotistical, that woman saw in Ursula's determination only what touched her personally; she declared in a rage that if Ursula went away, the Hotel de Maran would be again deserted, that she was so accustomed to the wit and animation of Ursula that she could not now bear to be without her, that solitude was dreadful to her; she conjured me to add my efforts to hers to retain Ursula, as if that was not my sole and only desire: notwithstanding her growing avarice Mademoiselle de Maran declared that she should not think any sacrifice too great that would keep Ursula near her; that if the forty thousand francs that she gave me were not sufficient to render her house agreeable she would give me more; everything that was necessary, even if she touched her capital: she had so few more years to live that she might commit that folly she said—

"I enter into all those details to shew you how great was the influence exercised by Ursula: it was sufficient to vanquish the sordid avarice of Mademoiselle de Maran, who had till now shamefully abused my prodigality, and had made great difficulty in allowing me annually, the sum she had promised for the support of her house.

"We went up to Ursula—Mademoiselle de Maran and I—she supplicated, she employed all her wit, all her powers of flattery, to prevail on Ursula not to quit her; Ursula was inflexible. Mademoiselle de Maran wept, she exclaimed that the fate of a poor old woman, alone, and abandoned to the care of servants was horrible; she confessed to having been unamiable enough to have made many enemies, and she said that if Ursula persisted in leaving her no one would come to see her, for that the Revolution of July had scattered all the old connections she could have relied on.

Ursula remained inflexible.

Then Mademoiselle de Maran, getting into a furious rage, loaded her with bitter reproaches, spoke to her of her ingratitude, of her misconduct. Ursula smiled, and said not a word; at last we asked her how she would live she answered "that there remained *trente mille francs* of her fortune, and that would be sufficient for her."

"This is the picture of the cruel position in which I now find myself; I know enough of Ursula's character to be certain that nothing less than a prodigy could make her change her resolution. I quitted her two hours ago without having been able to extract a word from her; I have tortured my mind to endeavour to guess the cause of this sudden determination in vain, I can no more understand it, than I can divine the cause of the grief and preoccupation which I have witnessed in her for some time past.

"With her character, it cannot be remorse for her conduct: at one time I was inclined to think that it was caused by her experiencing a real and deep passion, but though I have seen her flirt with so many, though I have often felt doubts of her fidelity, yet nothing in her intercourse, even with those I was the most jealous of, has even taken the form of real passion. Ursula was with them, as with me, uncertain, capricious, fantastical, and haughty, but never have I seen her absent and *triste* as she has been for this month past.

"But—hold—an idea has this moment burst upon me—yes—why not—now for pity's sake do not laugh at me—why should not the growing sadness of Ursula be caused by her regrets for having dissipated more than half my fortune?

"Her quitting, so suddenly, Mademoiselle de Maran, without assigning any reason for that step; does it not seem likely that Ursula wishes to prove to me, that she loves me for myself, by renouncing the splendour that surrounded her? say—why should it not be so? Touched at last by my repeated proofs of attachment, is not that woman capable of now disdaining the luxury that formerly pleased her? perhaps she is pining after a quiet and retired life in some place far from Paris, or perhaps in some foreign country; if it is so—if it is so—oh! I shall be ready to die of joy. She has so completely upset all my former tastes and habits, that now I detest the gay world as much as I once loved it; my only desire is to pass my days near her, in the midst of a profound solitude; there at least she would be entirely my own; every moment of her life would be my own. Do not take these for vain words, or exaggerations; it is now more than two years that my love for her has gone on always encreasing; the resources of her wit are so great and many, her beauty has in it always something new, her manners, ever varying with new fascinations, render the possession of one such woman more valuable than a whole seraglio.

"I spent the honey-moon with my wife, at the end of a fortnight I was tired of it; there was a monotonous weight of tenderness that was quite insupportable—no change—no variety—but with Ursula—such a life with Ursula—I declare to you—I should go mad with joy.

"Oh yes—yes; I feel I am not now deceiving myself; everything becomes clear to me, after having dissimulated so long, Ursula can do so no longer; her love for me, so long concealed, will at length burst forth; after all, was it probable that any woman however corrupted or insensible she might be could remain untouched by such devoted love as mine.

"But then that domino? well perhaps she was jealous of me—yes—now I remember having mentioned some days before, that I intended going to that masked ball; what occurred yesterday prevented

me, but Ursula, not aware of the change, went to be a spy on me.

"How rejoiced I am, I thought of writing to you; I feel so much happier at the close of this letter, than I did at its commencement. Hope once more dawns upon me, and after two years of uncertainty, jealousy, and torments, I feel I am about to reap the reward of my patience and devotion.

"I must close my letter in haste; pray answer me more regularly, for, lazy as you are, my three first letters remain unanswered, by that means, however, you have now my whole history complete before you; give me your candid opinion of it; tell me what you think of this latter part of it; but do not, I implore you, attempt to dissipate my new-born hopes, I feel I have such good grounds to entertain them that.....  
.....

4 o'clock.

Oh! curses on her—curses on me! I have this moment received a letter from Mademoiselle de Maran; Ursula has quitted her hotel; they know not where she is gone; she has announced in a note to Mademoiselle de Maran that she will see her no more; oh! this is horrible! what can I do? what can I do? Oh! my presentiments! my blind and stupid hopes; now I understand it. But I will be revenged. Answer me; advise me; I am wretched; but I swear it, I will be revenged.

G. de Lancry.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE MASKED BALL.

I HAD just finished reading this letter, when M. de Rochegune came in; I had not seen him since the day before, having been engaged in accomplishing a pious pilgrimage with Blondeau, and I spent the evening absorbed in melancholy reflections.

"Well," said he, holding his hand out to me, "how do you find yourself? had you good courage yesterday?"

"Courage? yes! I have no fear of giving myself up to thoughts of that excellent friend whom we have lost; however, I must confess to you, that in the midst of my regrets, a thought occurred to me, which was almost painful, because it appeared to me like ingratitude."

"How is that?"

"The thought which came across me was that I should have lamented the loss of M. de Mortagne more, if I had not known you."

"I might reproach myself in the same manner, Matilda; but I reassure myself, to love what our friend loved, to protect what he protected, is not to forget him, it is on the contrary the best proof of being faithful to his memory: only sometimes I cannot help saying to myself with sadness—How happy he would have been in witnessing our happiness."

"And what a defender we should have had in him, my friend!"

"Have we need of one? Is not our love appreciated even by the world, which is so unused to believe in pure and disinterested affections. Our love! if you knew the charm of those words—for you love—Matilda—you love me."

"Oh! yes—I love you, and sometimes I ask myself by what insensible transformation that love has taken the place of the profound and almost respectful friendship that I used to feel for you."

"Listen to me Matilda; will you make me very happy?"

"Speak—speak."

"Well! question your heart aloud, and let me hear all that you feel towards me at this present moment, let the impressions be good or bad, lay them open to me with the utmost frankness, I will shew you the same mark of confidence."

"I think that is a charming idea; I shall like so much from time to time to compare the riches of our love."

"Each time to count its increase, the true pleasure of a miser."

"And then, it appears to me, my friend, that to establish that kind of mutual confession may be useful to us, in pointing out to us the dangers that either weakness or false shame may be leading us into, and which otherwise perhaps we might not have perceived. And you know we must be unflinchingly severe with ourselves when we consider the high standard that we have erected as the foundation of our love."

"Oh! yes! Hearts less brave than ours, might almost regret the height at which we are placed, but there are certain positions like a besieged town—we cannot abdicate them without shame, and the greater the struggle, the greater our glory in victory."

"One must have been loved by you, Matilda, in order to be able to comprehend the celestial happiness of a soul filled with passionate adoration, of which the felicity is yet so pure that our terrestrial instincts appear to be absorbed in the infinite space around us—and to leap the barriers of time and the impediments of earth. Oh! Matilda—I now can understand the felicity of a union of souls."

"And then, what enchants me still more in our love," said I to M. de Rochegune, "is, that it cannot be subject to any of the

impediments which accompany an ordinary kind of love, elevated to the sphere that it is, it must always escape the danger of satiety or inconstancy ; why then should it not be eternal ?”

“ Eternal ! yes Matilda, it will be eternal, because as you say it is disengaged from all the attributes which prove fatal to a mortal's love ! and the charming liberty that we enjoy is a magnificent reward ; oh ! if you knew how happy, how delightful it is to me, to pass my life thus near you—if you could guess all the plans I form—”

“ And I also, my friend ; you have no idea of all my plans for the future.”

“ Well, Matilda, the future is all your own.”

“ But it is such an *embarras des richesses*, I have so many plans, that I know not how to fix on any ; you cannot guess all the romances I create, of which you are the hero ; however for this year I think we must content ourselves with a tour to Italy, we must make Madame de Richeville accompany us, and the Prince and Princess D'Hericourt, on their return from Goritz, can join us at Florence.”

M. de Rochegune looked at me with surprise and then said with a smile—why should I be astonished ? there is nothing I should like so well, you have guessed my wishes, that was only natural.”

“ Why natural ?”

“ Because there are mysterious sympathies between us.”

“ Well, well, you approve then of my project, I am enchanted with it ; to wander with you over that land so famous in beauties of nature and art !”

“ And perhaps we shall establish ourselves for some time in that country. A winter at Naples, another at Rome. What do you say to it ? Madame de Richeville I am certain will be delighted with the idea.”

“ I say nothing, Matilda, I desire nothing, I think nothing, you have my destiny in your hands ; dispose of it as pleases you.”

“ Very well then, we will pass the winter at Naples, then we will come back to Italy, by way of Germany so as to see the banks of the Rhine in all the beauty of Spring, perhaps we may even stop some time in one of the old castles, one of those of which there are so many.”

“ Another of your projects, Matilda, which might surprise me again, so completely is it sympathetic with mine ; the same idea occurred to me ; on my return from Rome, I hired the castle of Aremberg, situated in the most romantic spot, and spent three months there ; you will recognise it, I am sure, just as well as if you had lived there a long time with me—but what a delightful prospect Matilda—what happiness it will be to live with you in that increased intimacy which travelling together will create, to

exchange each day our impressions, our joys, our reveries, our sadness !”

“ Our sadness !”

“ Yes, for the wishes of my father might have been realised.”

“ Be reasonable, my friend, ought we not to thank God for the unexpected happiness which he has granted us ?”

“ Oh Matilda, there is no bitterness in that regret though full of sadness, imagine a man as happy as possible on this earth—but still dreaming of the happiness of heaven.”

“ But see how we have wandered from the examination of our hearts ; I shall not let you escape it.”

“ Well then Matilda, what do you feel for me at this moment, I shall listen to you with the pride and satisfaction of a poet who hears his own works read—for your love for me is my work.”

After some minutes of reflection during which I sincerely questioned my own heart. I answered M. de Rochegune—“ there is an immense difference between my feelings now, towards you, and what they were a short time since.—I can only make you understand by a comparison, we were speaking just now of a romantic castle situated on the banks of the Rhine ; well, as a traveller, I am struck with it, the picturesque and charming situation fills me with admiration. I say to myself how happy I should be to pass my life in the midst of that solitude, animated by the sight of nature in its grandest forms ; every aspect pleases me, I admire it, I contemplate it, but not without bitterness, because there is a secret envy mixed with it. But if by some happy chance, that beautiful spot became my own, if I had the certainty of living for ever in that Eden, then my admiration would become exclusive, then I should consider all its beauties as my own, I should rejoice in them, I should be able to say “ it is *my* castle.”

Good and tender Matilda—at least the certainty and security of that possession—should make up to you, for the want of that magnificence which it ought to have, in order to be worthy of you.”

“ Oh ! my security is entire, my friend, it is not misplaced confidence. I shall never be jealous of you because you can never feel for another woman the same sentiment that you feel for me.”

“ Neither that, nor any other I swear to you.”

“ My friend let us speak of what is probable and possible, these sort of eternal vows are what one can expect only from a woman, and a woman only is capable of keeping them.”

“ Listen to me, Matilda, I will not exaggerate. not only do I speak to you with sincerity, but I can give you a proof at this moment of the truth of what I say.”

“ Really ! how apropos !”

“ Seriously, Matilda, since I know that you love me, there is no longer any other woman in the world for me ; for your sake, I am

become indifferent to all others. I can give you a proof of it, I tell you, a very recent proof."

"What proof, said I smiling, tell me quickly that I may see whether I am as little inclined to be jealous, as I said I was."

"The day before yesterday, on my return from Madame de Richeville's, where we had been passing the evening together, I found at my house a note containing the following words—:"

'A most unhappy person, who has a claim on your pity, entreats you to grant her a moment's interview ; circumstances however are such, that this person can only meet you this night, at the ball at the opera.'

At these words of M. de Rochegune, I know not what terrible presentiment rushed across my mind.

In the letter that I had just read of M. de Lancry's he spoke of Ursula's going secretly to this ball. I imagined that my cousin was the heroine of the history that M. de Rochegune was going to tell me.

My astonishment was so great that I exclaimed, "at the ball at the opera!—the night before last."

M. de Rochegune attributed that exclamation to another cause.

"It appears very strange to you, Matilda, and I confess to you my first impulse was not to attend this *rendevous*, but I reflected afterwards, that perhaps it was some unfortunate person who dared not make herself known to me except through the means afforded by this masked ball, and I had forgotten to tell you that she said she should wait for me near the clock from twelve o'clock till four in the morning ; that proof of patience, confirmed my suspicions, therefore I went to the ball. Unfortunately for that assignation I met with Madame de Longpré as I arrived, who entered into conversation with me, and afterwards another woman, very gay, and very satirical, but whose name I did not find out ; her conversation amused me so much that I forgot I was perhaps anxiously expected, at last however I made my way towards the clock, it was half past two."

"Well"—said I, to M. de Rochegune, trying to smile to hide my anxiety.

"Well, I saw standing, near the clock a woman in a black satin domino ; her head was bent down, she seemed absorbed in profound meditation, she did not perceive me ; wishing to ascertain if she were the person who had made the appointment, I approached her and said, 'if you are waiting for any one, Madame, he is at once very fortunate, and very culpable.' The domino trembled, hastily raised her head, and said to me with emotion—"Sir, I beseech you let us move away from here.' There was a great crowd, and we were some minutes before we could extricate ourselves from it, so that as I gave my arm to the unknown, I felt, when the pressure of the crowd threw her close to me, her heart beating with the most violent agitation."

"Was she tall?"

"A little taller than you, Matilda; very slight; and she appeared to have a charming figure. In order to escape from the crowd we mounted up to the second tier of boxes; the woman trembled to such a degree that I proposed to her to seat herself. 'No—no,' cried she with emotion, and pressing my arm with a convulsive movement, *'it is the first time that I have leant on this noble arm—it will be also the last; let us walk on—let us walk on.'*"

"But then, what did you say to her—what did she want?"

"To speak of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, and with profound admiration."

"She wished to speak to you of me—of me—of me?" cried I, more and more persuaded that that mysterious domino could be no other than Ursula.

"Yes, she spoke of you, Matilda, and in such terms that I envied her; never had I heard your heart, your disposition, your conduct more appreciated, more eloquently praised. I was charmed in listening to that unknown woman, I was affected by the passionate admiration with which she spoke of our love, of our happiness. In truth, Matilda, to comprehend the elevation of such sentiments, she must have been capable of experiencing them herself."

"You think so?"

"I do not doubt it, I assure you, that the charm of her conversation was so great, you being always the subject of it, that I regretted when the time came that it must terminate. Never had I met with wit more cutting, more brilliant, for after she had dwelt with admiration on our attachment, she loaded with sarcasms all those who were opposed to it. Either I am much mistaken or that woman is a character of most rare energy, for by a strange contrast when she spoke of you and me, her voice was gentle, insinuating, and pleasing beyond description, but when it became a question of our enemies, it was harsh and imperious. I shall never forget the portraits she drew of your husband and your infamous cousin."

"She spoke to you of Ursula?" cried I.

"Oh, yes, a great deal, and in such a strain of indignation! with such contempt! she immolated Ursula and M. de Lancry without mercy, perhaps, she was more severe upon your cousin than your husband, for this unknown friend of yours seemed to feel a cruel kind of joy in abusing the infamous conduct of that woman, her powers of satire were also most unmercifully brought into play in speaking of Mademoiselle de Maran, in short, Matilda, I assure you that a little time back, I should have had my head turned, by that unknown, who evinced such indignation against vice, and so much charming sensibility in praising all that is noble

and good ; even now I was much struck with it, but still I am indifferent and feel but a small share of curiosity to find out who she is ; whereas, before, as I have told you I should have spared no pains in endeavouring to discover the real character of that mysterious creature—thus you see, Matilda, that nothing but *you* can really interest me—and that I was sincere in saying I existed only for you.”

“ But tell me did you think this woman young and handsome ? ”

“ Handsome ? I don’t know ; but young, certainly. Her sweet clear voice, her sylph-like form, and easy and graceful movements, all declared it ; besides, I saw her hand without a glove, and if I had never seen yours, I should say it was the prettiest in the world, while the perfect contour and white smooth surface of it most undoubtedly announced her youth.”

“ And how did your interview end ? What did she want, after all ? ”

“ To have—as she told me—the only conversation she could ever have with me, to judge herself if all she had heard of me was true—and to express to me all her deep felt wishes for our happiness—then—but you will laugh at me and my unknown—and you will have reason.”

“ Oh ! say why.—I beseech you.”

“ I must prepare you by saying that I was much surprised—on my honor there was nothing I expected less than such a strange proof of her admiration.”

“ Pray tell me ; I assure you I will not laugh at you.”

“ Well, then, at the moment of parting, that singular woman cordially held out her hand to me ; I took it—then—but really it is too ridiculous to repeat the folly that she committed.”

“ I wish to know it.”

“ Prepare yourself then to laugh—for my unknown carried my hand to her lips beneath her mask, with a movement at once timid yet passionate—so much so—as to strike me with surprise. She bent down her head, a tear fell on my hand and the next moment my domino had disappeared in the crowd.”

Upon some frivolous pretence, I put off, till the next day, the walk that I was engaged to take with M. de Rochegune, and I remained alone.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE DISCOVERY.

I was on the point of telling M. de Rochegune who was the mysterious domino that he had met at the opera ; but fearful of acting precipitately I took some little time for reflection.

I knew the heart and character of M. de Rochegune sufficiently, to be certain that his feelings towards Ursula were those of aversion and contempt. Yet notwithstanding I was aware of the seductions of that woman and how powerful they were !—I had experienced such fatal proofs of it.

By praising me she had succeeded in arresting M. de Rochegune's attention, she had pleased and interested him. I was not certain if I should efface those impressions in naming my cousin ; while if I did not name her I hoped that he would soon forget that mysterious interview.

In his letter M. de Lancry spoke of the *sombre tristesse* which had taken possession of Ursula for some time past, of the extraordinary change that had taken place in all her tastes and habits.

She, hitherto, so inconsiderate, so full of levity, was resolved, he said to quit the Hotel de Maran, and she had actually fulfilled her threat.

In comparing all this, with this adventure at the ball. I asked myself, if a new passion, violent and imperious, yet deep and real for M. de Rochegune whom she knew by sight, and all the world was talking of, had not entirely engrossed the soul of Ursula. I called to mind that passage in her insolent letter to my husband, in which she painted with such glowing colours and burning eloquence the love that she might one day feel, for the man who was destined to exercise despotic power over her.

Already that woman had struck a fatal blow to my dearest affections, might she not persevere in her hatred, and wish to do so again.

I could not feel any doubts of M. de Rochegune, I did not lower myself in my own estimation by any false modesty: but still—I could not help vaguely dreading some new misfortune, some unexpected blow.

I was not mistaken—the misfortune arrived ..the blow was struck...if not by Ursula at least through her influence, as if that influence was destined always, to be fatal to me.

What I have now to confess is so delicate an analysis, that I have been obliged to interrogate and investigate for a length of time my most secret thoughts, and *souvenirs*, in order to keep the thread of those inexplicable sensations which were leading me on to one of the most important, as well as one of the saddest incidents of my life.

But I have promised to confess all my errors, all my weakness, and I will not shrink from my task, however painful it may be, nor from the explanation, strange as it may appear. Guess what struck me the most on the recital of Ursula's interview with M. de Rochegune? Guess what made me feel a commotion of sensations that almost annihilated me, guess what caused the first blush I had occasion to feel, the first dread at my heart which caused me to doubt myself, my courage, my virtue, my right to the high esteem in which I was held—can you guess?

It was the kiss that Ursula bestowed on M. de Rochegune's hand in parting.

This may appear foolish, impossible, miserable, I know it is so, for even at this moment, writing these lines, in solitude, I blush for myself, as if I were surrounded with spectators.

Yes! when M. de Rochegune mentioned that kiss—my cheeks became crimson, I felt as if I had received an electric shock; a sensation that I had never experienced before, violent and painful, caused me almost to shiver with anger—all my blood flew to my heart—*malgré-moi*.

Whilst M. de Rochegune was speaking I fixed my eyes on his hand, as if searching with agony to discover the mark of the burning kiss, that Ursula had imprinted on it.

For the first time I remarked, or rather I took pleasure in remarking, that *that* hand was one of perfect beauty; for the first time I experienced a sentiment of painful jealousy, the source and the consequences of which I dreaded to investigate. If my love had been as pure, as ethereal, as I had believed it to be, that kiss would have been indifferent to me. That additional proof of the *cynicism* of Ursula, might perhaps have made me feel indignant—but it would not have troubled me.

Alas, I will not affirm that even had the interview between M. de Rochegune and Ursula not taken place I should have escaped those feelings, perhaps that only anticipated the fatal moment

which was destined to shew me the vanity of my noblest desires, the weakness of my character, and the irresistible power of a guilty love—but I can swear, by all that I have since suffered, that it was a most cruel discovery to me. Those who for a long time have proudly relied on themselves, on the strength and elevation of their principles, which raised them far above others; those only can comprehend my grief.

I did not deceive myself, in the same manner as a spark is sufficient to cause a fire, so that impression was sufficient at once to enlighten me as to the nature of my love.

What then was my future life to be?

If I were courageous enough to combat that *penchant*, now become criminal, what struggles, what hidden grief, what burning tears, shed in silence and shame, must be my lot—what a task to dissimulate every moment of that intimacy hitherto so delightful, and what constraint, to watch and watch without ceasing, over that unhappy secret, which after all a tone of my voice or an unguarded look might betray.

And then to complete my misery and mortification to feel that I was the first to profane the purity of our love—to have it perhaps guessed at. Oh! no, no, I exclaimed—a thousand deaths would be preferable to that last pitch of degradation.

I then became indignant at all these thoughts, I wished to drive them from my mind; but they returned incessantly. I could not help thinking of all the personal attractions of M. de Rochegune; I, who had hitherto admired in him, nothing but his noble character and great qualities.

What shall I do? I exclaimed to myself; what shall I do. Fly and abandon all that I love? Ah, is not that condemning myself again to isolation, tears, and despair? No, no, I am tired of suffering; and then to quit such good and devoted friends, and to quit him—him whom I love—whom I love with passion—yes, even with idolatry. Alas, it was with this, as with most passions; its irresistible power was first discovered to me, by the grief it caused; for the first time it made me weep—weep bitter tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

I awaited with terrible anxiety the time when I should prove to myself, if my alarms were well founded. Perhaps my imagination had exaggerated my fears. If on my next meeting M. de Rochegune I should perceive no change in my impressions—I should begin to feel reassured.

At six o'clock I went to Madame de Richeville's. M. de Rochegune was to dine there, and we were to go altogether to the concert.

"Well! my dear Matilda," said the Duchess to me, "you profited by this fine cold morning to go and make your purchases? what did M. de Rohegune think of the bronze statues? he is such a connoisseur, that I have implicit confidence in his taste."

For the first time, I felt myself blush when he was mentioned.

I tried to answer with a steady voice :

"I did not go out, I had a little tooth ache."

Madame de Richeville smiled, held up her finger to me, and said :

"Oh! the lazy one! she preferred sitting over the fire, talking to her friend, and the poor bronze statues were sacrificed."

"Oh no! I assure you—I——"

"Well! between ourselves I think you were right, it is so difficult to tear oneself away from a tender conversation, however I hope you have not delayed too long—the concert begins by a symphony of Beethoven's which I should be very sorry to lose."

"M. de Rohegune quitted me quite early."

"He must then have found something that engrossed him very much, to have prevented his finishing his morning with us, as he usually does. In truth my dear Matilda, sometimes it appears to me almost like a dream, that such an intimacy can subsist between a young woman of twenty, and a man of thirty, without any scandal, but it would be difficult to find two other such persons as you are."

These words of Madame de Richeville, which, only the day before, would have been as usual, most agreeable to me, now embarrassed me, and made me blush, fortunately however for me, Madame de Richeville did not perceive my emotion, and she continued :

"Ah! such men, are very rare! I cannot help making that reflection, when I consider the day must come when Emma will marry."

"But why should you fear for her, my friend, does she not possess all the qualities worthy of the best of men?"

"If maternal love does not blind me, I should say she does—but alas! my dear, to deserve, is not to obtain."

"But remember how handsome she is, and wonderfully talented."

"Yes! but her birth," said the Duchess sighing. "I shall, without doubt, be obliged to search for a husband for her, in a lower class of society than our own, and that is painful to me, not from a feeling of pride, but of tenderness. As Emma's character develops itself, I see more and more how susceptible and sensitive she is, so that certain habits, and manners, which might not strike another, would be unbearable to her, as differing from what she has been accustomed to..... but now that we are speaking of that dear child..... I must tell you something which I have hitherto concealed." I looked at Madame de Richeville with astonishment.

Perhaps I may be mistaken," continued she, "as you do not appear to have been struck with 'anything'.....and it has reference particularly to you."

"To me; explain yourself, I beseech you."

"Well," continued Madame de Richeville with a slight degree of embarrassment, "have you not perceived, for some time past, a change in Emma's conduct towards you?"

"No, indeed not I, or if I have, I think she has redoubled her kindness and attention.....also I quite forgot to tell you another proof of her affection which occurred a few days since, seeing that she was absent as she often is now, I said to her, 'Emma, what are you thinking of?'"

"I am thinking that I wish my name was Matilda, like yours," she replied.

"And why so? Is not Emma a very pretty name?"

"Yes; but I prefer Matilda."

"But why," asked I, "what can be your reason?"

"I prefer it because it is yours."

"And indeed I believe the dear child meant what she said, for her sincerity is so great, I never knew her fail in it."

"You are right, Matilda; I have studied her well, that frankness which is with her spontaneous and involuntary, has explained to me many otherwise strange appearances; for Emma is so little accustomed to conceal anything, that that dear child almost thinks aloud...sometimes I really fear such a singular disposition almost denotes weakness of mind...."

"How can you think *that*, when on the contrary Emma astonishes me and all our friends by the extraordinary facility with which she acquires knowledge, and by the charming grace of her conversation. No, if you analyse the cause, you will see it proceeds from her possessing such angelic purity, such exquisite candour, that she has no occasion to disguise any impression that she receives."

"You re-assure me, your heart understands her, and I am sure you love her as if she were your sister. The poor child returns your affection; you cannot imagine how fond she is of you; she has begged me to allow her to imitate you in every thing, and even to dress like you."

"Dear Emma, how much she loves me, but you have accustomed her to hear my praises so much, that in her *naïveté* she thinks she cannot prove her admiration better, than by imitating me."

"Perhaps you are right, my dear Matilda; but yet there is one thing which has struck me...it is..."

At this moment Emma entered the drawing-room. Madame de Richeville made me a sign to observe her attentively.

## CHAPTER XXIX,

## THE CONCERT.

EMMA approached Madame de Richeville and kissed her, then according to her usual custom having embraced her mother, she turned to me ; but suddenly she stopped, as if struck by some sudden reflection ; her charming face and neck became one deep blush ; she fixed her eyes on me for a moment with an undefined kind of expression, then cast them down, while the blush on her countenance became still deeper.

Her mother made a sign to me to remark this.

After a moment's silence she put both her hands on her heart, saying with an accent of charming candour,

"How my heart beats still..."

"And then she added, looking at her mother,

"I know not why, but I cannot help blushing when I see Madame de Lancry ; I feel myself so much overcome, that I hesitate a moment before I embrace her."

Then as if she had conquered this internal struggle which was depicted by a sort of contraction of her features, she threw her arms round my neck, saying with an enchanting grace,

"Ah ! happily that has passed away now...but for the moment it was very painful to me."

Madame de Richeville gave me another look, and then said to Emma,

"But, my child, what did you feel ?"

"I do not know," replied she, looking down with an expression of angelic candour. "I came in quite joyous ; all of a sudden, on seeing madame de Lancry, my heart began to beat violently, and

painfully...but that impression quickly vanished, and now that I have embraced her, I feel as happy as ever."

And Emma embraced me again.

"And how long is it, dear child, since you have felt all this?" asked I, retaining her hand in mine.

"I can hardly tell; it came on by degrees, and what I cannot understand is, that every day my pain and my pleasure augment...and yet not so," added she, appearing to question herself. "No...it is something more than pleasure which I feel the instant after the pain which your presence has caused me."

"What is it then?" asked her mother, who, as well as myself, felt interested to the greatest degree.

"It is"...said she with hesitation..."rather the feeling of having done a good action...or as if I had triumphed over some wicked thoughts."

"But those wicked thoughts, what are they?" asked I.

"I do not know, for I do not think I ever had any," said she, "but it seems to me they would cause that sensation, if I had."

Madame de Richeville looked at me in silence.

They now announced successively Madame de Semur, the Duke and Duchess de Grandval.

The conversation became general; all were arrived except M. de Rochegune.

He came soon afterwards.

After shaking hands with Madame de de Richeville, he came on to me; involuntarily, and contrary to my usual custom, my first impulse was to refuse the hand he held out to me, but perceiving his astonishment I hastened to take it. I know not whether he found mine burning or cold, I know not whether he perceived the blush and the slight trembling which agitated me. I know not whether he guessed the cause of the emotion I betrayed, but certainly he kept my hand in his rather longer than was customary; I drew it back quickly.

"How do you find yourself? Has your toothache gone off?" asked he, with interest.

"A thousand thanks, sir; I still suffer a little."

My answer was a fresh cause of astonishment to M. de Rochegune; the terms of intimacy on which we were, and which were so openly acknowledged in Madame de Richeville's circle, were such that in addressing him, it was never my custom to call him sir, nor did he ever call me madame.

For the first time I felt annoyed at these proofs of our intimacy. The dinner was soon after announced; M. de Grandval offered his arm to Madame de Richeville, being an older man than M. de

Rochegune, who offered his to me ; I whispered to him in a tone of reproach :

"And who is to take Madame de Sémur?"

It was too late ; Madame de Sémur passed on before us, having gaily taken Emma's arm.

If my own reflections had not convinced me how foolishly I was acting, M. de Rochegune's remark, as soon as we were seated, would have reminded me of it.

"My God ! what has happened to you since I left you ?" asked he, in a voice at once gentle and sad.

These words recalled me to myself, and for the first time I felt the necessity of dissimulation ; I therefore replied with a smile :

"Nothing has happened to me ; it is only a peice of childishness which I will explain afterwards, though I am suffering a little still from my tooth-ache."

Reassured by these words M. de Rochegune entered into conversation with his usual spirit, and I had time to calm myself and assume my former manner. What struck me as singular was, that I often perceived Emma's eyes fixed on me, as if she wished to read my very thoughts.

At first I bore this with a smile, but she continued to fix on me so penetrating and persevering a look, that at last I became annoyed, and endeavoured to avoid it.

I was on the point of being overcome, foolishly imagining that Emma guessed at the thoughts which were agitating me, but by a great effort I once more conquered my emotion, and by a strong reaction resolved to recover myself ; I became extremely gay and talkative, all my reserve towards M. de Rochegune vanished, and even Madame de Richeville and her friends remarked my gaiety which astonished them.

Thus passed the dinner, almost immediately afterwards we set off for the concert, I took M. de Rochegune's arm this time, without any hesitation.

I had made up my mind, that this evening should be the decisive proof, having Monsieur de Rochegune always with me, not making the slightest change in my usual habits of intimacy with him, and placing no check on any new impression that I might experience. Once convinced that my fears were well grounded I should then firmly make my decision.

We arrived at the concert.

I was placed in a front row, between Madame de Richeville, and Madame de Grandval, the gentlemen were just behind us, I know not whether the previous excitement, the nervous irritation, the various emotions I had experienced, predisposed me more than usual to enjoy the music, but certainly I had never felt it to be

so ineffable, so ravishing, and my soul seemed to float in the delicious harmony that was wafted around me.

I remember one particular moment, when everything seemed to combine, to encrease that state of excitement.

Rubini was singing, most delightfully, a song in *La Sonnambule*, Madame de Richeville from an involuntary movement of admiration seized my hand exclaiming :

"How sublime that is !"

Just behind me was M. de Rohegune, he bent forward a little in order to hear Rubini better, I felt his breath on my shoulder and even amongst the ringlets of my hair which hung down my back, and while I was listening to that charming voice, singing a song of impassioned tenderness, I was inhaling the perfume of a magnificent bouquet of roses and stephonites, the cherished gift of one, most dear to me.

Oh no, I shall never forget that moment of complete happiness...to have next to me my dearest friend, near me, the man whom I adored, to hear the most enchanting sounds, and inhale the odour of the sweetest flowers, and those flowers, the gift of a lover...

I have resolved not to shrink from any avowal, so I must confess I had never felt anything to equal it before, never had the presence of M. de Rohegune so much agitated me ; yet never had I felt him half so dear to me ; at that moment, too, I, in general so little addicted to vanity, felt myself to be superbly beautiful, and gloried in being so ; I think the expression of my countenance must have betrayed this, for when the song was over, having turned round, as well as Madame de Richeville, towards M. de Rohegune, the Duchess looked at me for a moment in silence, and then said in a low voice to our friend,

"Pray look at Matilda...I have never seen her look so pretty..."

He regarded me with an air, at once, astonished, charmed...he trembled slightly, and by an expressive sign of his head, testified that he shared with Madame de Richeville in her admiration.

"Really," said I in a low voice to her, "you think I am looking pretty !.....well ! I am delighted at that"...added I, fixing my eyes on M. de Rohegune...there could not be any time it would have made me more happy to be considered so."

M. de Rohegune regarded me for one second fixedly.

It is impossible for me to attempt to describe the electric power of that look, which seemed to penetrate every fibre of my heart...that look of only a second which answered to mine, and in which I saw blazing the depths of the most ardent passion.

The concert continued.

M. de Rohegune fell back, covering his face with his hands ; I

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The Despair of Passion

turned my head several times to look at him, but he remained always in that position.

The concert terminated ; it was arranged that the party were to drink tea with me. I invited a few more friends whom we had met at the concert. I returned in the carriage with Madame de Richeville, Emma, and M. de Rochegune, who appeared silent and *pre-occupé*.

I asked Emma if she had enjoyed the music.

"No! it seemed to do me harm—I quite suffered," she replied gently, "I had the greatest difficulty to prevent myself from crying."

We arrived at my house.

As I passed a looking glass, I was struck by my own appearance, as Madame de Richeville had remarked, I did indeed look handsomer than I had ever looked before. I had on a pale blue silk dress, trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon, some red camillas in my light hair, which fell in ringlets almost to my shoulders.

During the moment that I took a rapid survey of myself it appeared to me that my figure was more graceful ; my eyes more brilliant ; my complexion more transparent ; my lips more vermillion ; my whole appearance animated by some new power ; vague dreams of happiness seemed to float around me, all inspired by that one rapid glance that I had exchanged with M. de Rochegune.

But I could no longer deceive myself : that fatal experiment had unveiled to me all the depth, all the strength of his passion for me.

That evening passed like a dream, it was singular that notwithstanding all that was passing in my mind I did the honours *à merveille*, so that when she took leave of me Madame de Richeville embracing me said, "I must pay the same compliment to your wit, as I have already to your beauty. I have never seen you so charming as you have been this evening."

Notwithstanding the tender affection I felt for Madame de Richeville, I was glad of her departure. I felt the factitious strength which had hitherto supported me, rapidly giving way. Hardly were all my guests departed when I fell insensible in the arms of my poor Blondeau. The proof that I was determined to have had left no doubt... Love, pure and heroic, was a dream.... *une chimère*...



## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE CONFESSION.

I expected to see M. de Rochegune the next morning. He came about two o'clock, and begged me to be at home to no one else.

He looked pale, sad, and troubled ; his features had an expression of touching langour which I had never remarked in them before.

It appeared to me, that a decisive moment in my destiny was approaching, and that everything would depend on the degree of resolution I could sustain. I endeavoured therefore to collect all my strength. I called to my aid all the powers of dissimulation I possessed, so as to appear thoughtless and gay. I hastened to say in a giddy manner to M. de Rochegune :

" You must have thought me very capricious yesterday morning, did you not ? after having promised to go out with you, and then sending you away alone ; pray confess that you did !"

Monsieur de Rochegune kept silence a moment, and then said :

" Matilda, you believe me to be an honest man ?"

" My heavens ! what a grave beginning."

" Grave indeed ! very grave—and so it ought to be !"

" And why so ?"

After another interval of silence, he replied :

" Matilda, I have never said an untruth. Yesterday I promised to confide to you all my thoughts, good or bad. I did not then imagine how soon I should find occasion to fulfil that promise."

" Really, my friend, you almost frighten me ; what sudden change has——"

" Matilda, it appears to me like a dream. To explain what I feel is impossible. I yield to I knew not what fatal charm, which, ever since yesterday, has upset all my thoughts, and even my firmest principles ; I no longer recognize myself—but also, I no longer recognize you."

" What is it that you mean ?"

" Since yesterday I have seen you a perfectly different woman to what you were before."

" I—I—do not understand you," said I, trying to force a smile ; " I cannot make out how I can appear to you under such a different aspect, since yesterday."

" In vain should I try to explain to you the cause of that transformation. I have not the power of doing it. In vain have I

questioned myself why the sight of you yesterday caused me emotion I had never felt before. Your countenance was no longer the same ; Madame de Richeville remarked it as well as me, for she told me she had never seen you looking so pretty...that you know is true ; the expression of your countenance, usually so gentle, so calm, and so undisturbed, was by turns brilliant or languid ; your voice was more soft, your complexion more animated, your smile more fascinating ; close behind you I almost thought I saw you tremble, as I approached you, you were surrounded by I know not what magnetic atmosphere that attracted, while it seemed to intoxicate me ; but no, it was no delusion, you were, you are now, handsomer than I have ever seen you before, or rather you are embellished with an additional degree of beauty."

"Come, come, my friend, you are still more poetical than you generally are ; you are going to try the effect of flattery on me. Perhaps yesterday I was more becomingly dressed than usual ; that is the whole mystery of the change ; but what is not changed in me are the sentiments which I have towards you, which your friend your sister, has sworn to be faithful to !"

"My sister ! My sister ! Ah ! I have never loved you as a sister—I have told you so before ; only hitherto I have had courage and power over myself ; hitherto I have believed that one could love with impunity such a woman as you ; hitherto I believed that the intimacy in which we lived, would suffice to me. I believed in the existence of a sublime and ideal love, and thought that the admiration I felt would be free from human passion. Well, Matilda, I have no longer that courage, I have no longer that belief, vows promises, principles—all are forgotten ; my passion, suppressed for so long, has burst forth at last. Matilda...Matilda, I confess it ; if there is one more weak, more unworthy than another, that one is myself. But at least have pity...pity, for a love so intense—so absorbing, that it seems to threaten my reason."

I shuddered at the peril I had run ; in retracing to me his emotions, M. de Rochegune had drawn the picture of my own. I could not suppress a secret feeling of pride and happiness at seeing how blindly and fondly I was loved, but I soon collected my courage, and I felt myself stronger, when I saw the weakness of M. de Rochegune—I said to myself, "it will be a grand thing for me to restore him to his former self, and thus at once to save us both."

After a moment's silence I answered him in an affectionate manner, but with a voice at once calm and serious.

"Forgive me, my friend, for having hitherto answered you frivolously : you have given me a touching proof of your confidence, in the avowal you have made to me, and I thank you for it."

I held out my hand to him, with dignity, the reserve I had sustained struck him.

I continued :

"Though there is doubtless exaggeration in what you say, yet it does not astonish me, for I expected it."

"You! Matilda!"

"Yes! my friend; recollect our conversation of yesterday; did you not say to me—'The intimacy which we enjoy is only purchased by sacrifices; the greater they are, the greater the glory of making them!'"

"Matilda," cried he, "do not speak to me of the past: an abyss separates yesterday from to-day."

"Well then, my friend," said I, with a gentle smile, "like the good fairy in the fairy tale, I shall throw an invisible bridge over that abyss, and shall lead you across to the safe haven that you have wandered from, and where we can both retrace our steps."

Notwithstanding the smile that I assumed, my heart was bursting. M. de Rochegune appeared very much affected at my words, he remained some time silent, then he replied with a gentle sadness that amounted to timidity.

"You are right, Matilda, the past has been such as you describe it. I have experienced noble sentiments, I have loved you with purity and truth, but my character now is changed, I feel the happiness I enjoyed with you to be incomplete. I feel that I must pass my whole life with you...that there should be indissoluble ties between us, that..."

Oh! that language.

I understood it but too well! the same desires, the same wishes, had obtained dominion over my mind, yet was I obliged to answer him by words cold and severe.

"In truth my friend," said I, "I no longer recognize you. What! can it be you, who would desire to break down all the restraints of society—who would expose me to the bitter sarcasm and blame of the world, and even of those dear friends who now protect me. What would the Prince D'Hericourt and his wife think? they who have so nobly defended our love."

That question seemed to strike M. de Rochegune. He hesitated some moments, and I was almost sorry I had put it to him, as it appeared to me he was unable to answer it. During this conversation, notwithstanding the apparent reserve of my words I was more agitated, more affected than I had ever felt before, my love for M. de Rochegune seemed to have attained its height, and each moment I felt tempted to say to him:

"Let us fly together."

At last he answered sadly:

"I have never had recourse to falsehood with you, and I will not now, if you were to consent to fly with me, I should go to the Prince and tell him all."

"And what reproaches he would have a right to load you with."

"But after all," cried M. de Rochegune, with a kind of sad im-

patience, "what would the Prince's—what would the world's opinions signify to us—we must brave it; in renouncing all society, we should so far condemn ourselves, as to show them, that we no longer expect their esteem, or their interest. Let us have the courage to renounce at once the high position in which we stood; while we remained in it, we proved ourselves worthy of it, but now we willingly chuse our own happiness, in preference to the admiration of the world; there is nothing base or treacherous in such a proceeding; I will avow it in the face of every one."

"Alas, my friend," cried I, interrupting him, "should we be less culpable, for openly avowing that we are so; that avowal would not be a proof of generous courage but of gross effrontery. Ah believe me, if we were to fall, we should be obliged to go and hide ourselves like two criminals, and besides do you not consider the shame, and the dishonour that you would bring on my head."

"Dishonour? and are you not in reality free? has not the world pronounced a sort of moral divorce between you and your husband? Can your position be compared with that of any other married woman?"

"Yes, at present, even at this hour, there is no position can be compared to mine, but if I forget my duties, to-morrow I should be like to many other women, who have revenged their husband's infidelities, by deceiving them in their turn, and I, who have had the audacity to establish myself as a woman superior to human weaknesses—I should fall from that high pedestal in the midst of universal contempt."

"And of what consequence would that contempt be to you? oh Matilda, my love would compensate for it—your own happiness would avenge it; those who live in the world, and for the world, may dread it, but those who retire from it may brave, and despise it; as for me, friends, pride, ambition, duty, I have immolated them all to one single thought, one single desire—which centres in you."

"But your future career; your country to which you are so useful! the poor unfortunate people who depend upon your bounty."

M. de Rochegune shrugged his shoulders.

"The poor people are the only class I will give you an answer about; they should lose nothing, from our retreat, wherever it was. I should still watch over them, and prove to them their mysterious providence. Would not such a love as ours, open our hearts still more to sympathy for the unhappy. You look at me with surprise, Matilda, you are astonished to hear me speak in the strain I do, I who used to prize so much all that I now despise—I am even myself astonished at it, and I rejoice in it."

"What is that you say?"

"Yes that entire change in my ideas proves to me how great is your influence over me."

"Hitherto I have been proud of that influence, it led you to all

kinds of noble actions but now, I must blush for it, since it only inspires you with resolutions unworthy of you."

"And who dares to say that—who will presume to declare that we may not be reserved for some great good. Yes, our apparent fall may perhaps be only the precursor of a magnificent resurrection; yes a voice, that has never deceived me, tells me that notwithstanding the reproaches, notwithstanding the momentary abandonment of our friends they will return to us, through the force of circumstances, more devoted than ever, because we were never before, so worthy of them."

"How can that be?"

"I know not, but I am sure it will be so. Once more I tell you, Matilda, that whatever appearances may be; our love is as noble and great as ever, and the future will prove it so."

The accent, the countenance of M. de Rochegune were so expressive of faith in what he was saying, I felt myself so fatally persuaded that our love was still destined to some brilliant termination, that notwithstanding my determination to remain cold and reserved in my manner, I could not resist a movement of enthusiasm and exclaimed:

"Yes! yes! I believe what you say, I feel that it is so, it appears to me that you express the most secret feelings of my heart."

"Matilda!" cried he, falling at my knees, and taking my hands in his with a movement of passionate adoration, "let us fly! come...come with me, my friend! my sister! my mistress! my wife!"

These words, and the passionate looks of M. de Rochegune recalled me to myself. I got up quickly.

"Matilda," cried he, hiding his face in his hands, "forgive me...I am out of my senses."

A few minutes sufficed to calm my emotion, I then said in the coldest manner that was possible to me:

"Indeed you must be out of your senses to suppose that I would ever expose myself to the necessity of blushing for you and myself."

He threw a look of despair on me, and then exclaimed in a broken voice:

"Oh, you have never loved as I love you," and he burst into tears.

I confess it: oh, my God, if I had the strength of mind not to deceive him, not to assure him how completely I shared in his deep passion...in all his ideas, just or unjust, noble or culpable, it was, when at that moment, I took the resolution of flying with him, if, after one last and courageous effort, I could not conquer that fatal *entraînement*.

In order to leave me at full liberty so to act, I ought to take all hope from him, so as to render him, on his side, my auxiliary in the struggle I was entering on:

"Not love you," said I to him, "can you make me that cruel reproach? Is it not a proof that I love you tenderly, that I wish to spare you, as well as myself, eternal remorse?"

He rose and began walking up and down the room with great agitation, all of a sudden he stopped before me and said:

"Matilda, do you think it would be possible for me to hide from the observation of our friends, the emotions which agitate me?"

"I think that is reflecting on the deplorable consequences that..."

He interrupted me.

"Reflection...Will," said he, "are all insufficient to diminish, or even to enable me to dissimulate a passion so violent; every moment they would remark between us a constraint, a reserve, which would form a strange contrast to our late habitual terms of intimacy."

"Perhaps that might be the case, my friend, but rather let me hope that this passing exaltation, will be calmed, and that you, courageous as you are, will conquer this infatuation."

"It is because my character is firm and courageous, Matilda, that I feel more than another would, the irresistible power of the feeling which absorbs me; but it is also because I am firm and courageous," here he hesitated.

"Speak on, my friend, speak on."

"Well then, it is because I am courageous that I shall have the resolution to adopt the only course that can save us both. I shall quit you."

"Quit me; but that is impossible. You *could not* think of doing that."

"What then would you have me do, unhappy woman. Cease to see you? would that not awaken a thousand suspicions, provoke the enquiries of all our friends. To live with you, as I did before, I tell you, is now become impossible, I shall invent some pretence for travelling, and I shall go."

"You shall *not* go, I will not allow it. I love you, I have centered all my hopes in you...all the future that my life offers has reference to you...it is impossible that you can abandon me in that manner, you could not be so cruel."

"But then what am I to do? what can I resolve?"

"I know not, but in the name of Heaven, by the memory of your father, do not quit me...I could not survive it; I have had already so many misfortunes I have no longer strength to encounter fresh ones."

"Listen to me, Matilda, you know me to be incapable of threatening you with my departure in order to induce you to follow me. I never speak, I never act lightly; but after having reflected on everything I see that there remains to me no other course to pursue but flight...go then I must, and may God be my guide."

"Heavens, how you frighten me," cried I, struck by the ex

pression of despair which his features wore. He understood what I meant, and answered :

" My ideas on suicide will never alter ; it is a base action, and I shall never descend to anything that is base ; but expressly for that reason, that I shall never make away with myself, I shall remain the most wretched of men." And he hid his face in his hands, sobbing. Conquered by the sight of his tears I was on the point of confessing all to him, renouncing that last effort I was on the point of telling him how much I adored him, when, after a moment's silence, he raised his head, and said to me :

" After all, we are two mad people to think of deciding in an hour, the whole destiny of our lives. Not a word more, Matilda—not a word more ; we are both of us too much excited to continue this conversation....I shall go away to-day, and return in a fortnight, with the same feelings that I carry away with me. That I predict to you ; but you—you will have leisure to reflect seriously on the alternative I have proposed. I shall therefore return, either to consecrate the rest of my existence to you, or to pronounce an eternal farewell. I shall not write to you—I shall leave you to your unbiassed choice ; my only hope is that *the past* will plead for me with you...and the future——"

Here interrupting himself with a degree of agitation, that he could not conquer ; he only added in a voice of profound emotion——  
" In a fortnight."

I seized his hand repeating——  
" In a fortnight."  
He left me.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A VISIT.

AFTER M. de Rochegune's departure I burst into tears ; I reproached myself with my apparent insensibility ; I feared that I had driven him to despair ; that I had perhaps run the risk of alienating him from me. I bitterly regretted not having yielded to my first impression, which was, to quit all, to follow him ; if I lost him would the cold esteem of the world ever compensate to me for the loss of that love in which I had concentrated all the hopes, all the happiness of my life ?

I recognized now, more and more, the truth of those words of M. de Rochegune. My love for M. de Lancry had only been *une surprise de cœur* !

What a difference in my present feelings for M. de Rochegune,

they began by admiration for his noble character, then succeeded gratitude for his devotion to me, then a tender and affectionate friendship, then love ! pure and ideal—and then , alas ! a deep and absorbing passion.

The constant gradation of all these sentiments was a sure proof to me of their duration. I remained a prey to the most conflicting feelings, and the most painful struggles, for some days, after the departure of M. de Rochegune.

One must be a woman, in order to comprehend those terrible conflicts between passion and duty.

The absence of M. de Rochegune seemed to overpower me, to take away all my strength, and that served to give me an idea, how painfully my life would drag on, separated from him.

Hours, days, and nights, passed on in these painful irresolutions ; by degrees they weakened my powers of resistance, very soon I found (fatal sign) that I dared not interrogate my heart ; too certain that its answer would be in favour of M. de Rochegune.

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M. de Rochegune had given Madame de Richeville a very natural reason for his departure ; he told her that important business called him away to one of his estates.

One day that I went to pay my usual visit to Madame de Richeville, she told me, that Emma, who had been indisposed for some days, was much worse, and more sad than ever, I asked if I might see her ; she was asleep, so I would not disturb her.

The next morning, very early, Madame de Richeville came to me, I was struck by the expression of her countenance.

"What is the matter ?" I exclaimed.

"I am uneasy about Emma to the greatest degree," replied she, "I have passed all the night with her—just now she is dosing a little, so I have taken advantage of that moment to come to you... to come to you to give vent to my grief," cried she, unable any longer to restrain her tears, "for before her I dare not," and the poor mother began to sob.

"Re-assure yourself," said I, "there cannot be anything very serious in Emma's illness. What did the physician say, who saw her yesterday ? he is extremely clever and very sincere.

"It is just because he is so clever, and yet has confessed to me his inability to find out the cause of Emma's illness, that I am so horribly frightened ; he cannot find out any apparent cause for the languor which increases more and more on that unhappy child...he says she has a slow, nervous fever : but he also confesses that from one moment to another a violent crisis may come on."

"Does Emma suffer much ?"

I had been some little time with Madame de Richeville, when her valet came to tell me that a man who wished to speak to me on important business was waiting at my house for me, knowing me to be with Madame de Richeville.

"No doubt it is one of your men of business," said the duchess. "Go then, my dear Matilda; I will send and tell you when Emma awakes."

I returned home.

Judge of my astonishment and my fright. In my drawing-room, seated, reading near the fire...I saw M. de Lancry...my husband.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE INTERVIEW.

ALMOST stupified I remained immovable near the door, leaning with one hand on the handle to support myself, and with the other pressed on my heart to endeavour to still its beating.

M. de Lancry got up, quietly laid his book down on the table, and then remained standing near the fire, inviting me by a gesture to come to him.

The expression of his countenance was harsh and sardonic, but betrayed some kind of secret satisfaction.

I could not move a step; I thought it was a dream! M. de Lancry advanced towards me.

"What a reception after such a long separation," said he, attempting to take hold of my hand.

I drew it back quickly: he smiled with an ironical air.

"Oh, ho! so you have quite an aversion to me my dear!"

These words excited at once my indignation and my courage, I advanced with a firm step into the middle of the room:

"What do you want, sir?"

"Oh! I want many things, but it will take a long time to explain all that to you—will you be seated?"

"Sir."

"Oh! as you like—well then, remain standing."

And he sat himself down.

After some minutes of silence, during which he seemed to be reflecting, he looked up, and said:

"Confess, my dear friend, that I am a most accommodating husband."

"You are not come here to indulge in this miserable raillery, sir—-you have without doubt some powerful motive to induce you to

impose on me an interview so disagreeable to me. Be good enough to abridge it as much as possible.'

"Are you expecting M. de Rochegune by any chance?'

The blood mounted into my face. I did not reply:

"I shall be," he continued, "enchanted to see him again, and no doubt he will be equally pleased at this rencontre; see how agreeable these sort of frank positions are! see now the advantage of virtuous and platonic affections, no one is embarrassed neither the wife, nor the lover, nor the husband," then looking round him, he added, "why really you are very well situated here, quite solitary and mysterious."

"Once more sir, I ask you what you want with me?'

Without answering, M. de Lanery examined me attentively, and said:

"You are in high beauty, your situation as 'the deserted wife' seems to have suited you wonderfully well: and you have adopted with wonderful firmness the part you mean to play. Not the slightest emotion, not the slightest *attendrissement*, not even an expression of hatred, not a reproach! nothing but a contemptuous kind of impatience after more than three years of separation."

"Such being the case sir, you must feel how impatient I am to finish this interview, of which I can understand neither the end or the motive."

"I can easily imagine your impatience though it is but little flattering to me, either morally—or conjugally—for after all my dear—you are my wife—pray don't forget that circumstance, insignificant as it may appear to you perhaps."

"Thanks to God, sir, I had forgotten it—and it required your presence to put me in mind of it."

"And my absence will be sufficient to efface again this disagreeable *souvenir*. Is it not so? Oh! I comprehend your silence, it is as expressive as any words could be; but fortunately, Madam, I have not the same defective memory, excuse my bluntness; but allow me to tell you that I remember perfectly well, that I am your husband; I have no inducement to forget it when I see you looking so charming, so I am come to beg your pardon for having neglected you so long."

"It is useless, sir, to ask my pardon for neglect that I do not now feel, and that I have never resented."

"Oh, doubtless; so then my excuses serve only to acquit me to my conscience; but they may help me to obtain the favour I have come to solicit of you."

"I listen to you, sir, but you speak in enigmas."

"Really," said he, regarding me with an air of profound villany.

"Really, I speak in enigmas, do I? well then here is the solution of them; it is impossible for me to live any longer without you...and I beseech you to put an end to our too long separation."

I shrugged my shoulders without saying a word.

"You think, perhaps, that I am joking?"

"I have nothing to say to you, sir."

"I tell you, madam, that I am speaking seriously."

"I tell you, sir, that this interview has lasted too long; it is inconceivable that you should dare to come to me with such a demand."

"*Come to you! come to you!*" repeated he with a sardonic laugh...

"why you are losing your senses...it would be a great privilege if as chief of our common property I permitted you to say *come to us*... for I am master here."

"Sir?"

"Madame, have you never read any common law? you never have, have you? well you were wrong, for if you had done so, you would have known what my rights are."

I thought now I could understand the odious motive of this visit, and I reddened with indignation.

"It is money, without doubt, that you want sir?...said I with a look of withering contempt: he got up suddenly his features contracted with rage."

"Madame, take care."

"You are come no doubt to put some price on your absence... I regret more than ever your having ruined me, sir...for unfortunately, enough money does not remain to me to buy that inestimable favour."

"Oh, you can make epigrams can you," cried he, his eyes sparkling with rage and hatred, "but you do not know then how dependant you are on me? that I am here in my own home, that you are my wife, do you hear that, for ever my wife, that I can dispose of you, can do with you what seemeth best to me; that you cannot say a word; that I have the law on my side; and that I can either establish myself here, or take you away with me."

"I am aware sir, that you wish to frighten me by these threats, and in truth the menace is well chosen, for the idea of living with you again, would be sufficient to make me die of fright; but you forget sir, the scandal of your life has been so public, that you have forfeited all your rights upon me."

"Really I have lost my rights over you."

"And as to your visit, sir, has it can have but one motive, that of a wish to obtain money, and as unfortunately I have hardly enough to live upon, I repeat that you need expect nothing from me."

"Hold, exclaimed he, with a degree of concentrated rage more fearful, than his previous burst of passion, "if I were still capable of a feeling of pity, you would inspire me with it, you poor fool; listen to me attentively, for this joking tires me. When you allude to the scandal of my conduct, you mean my love for Ursula, and

my connection with her, is it not? Well, according to the laws I may have ten mistresses, without your having the power of saying a word, so long as I do not intrude them under the conjugal roof—and I defy you to prove that Ursula has set her foot in my house."

"Sir, your connection with Ursula is not the only thing."

"Oh! you would speak of my extravagance and dissipation? Then I must tell you again, as I did at the time of your whim to build a hospital, that by law the appropriation of our wealth belongs to me alone; let the employment of it be for a good purpose or a bad one, no one has any right to controul me...I am not obliged to render an account to any one; now I hope I have clearly established my position, and sufficiently proved my rights."

"Oh! very clearly, sir! and——"

"Cease; my determination is that you shall return to me. I give you forty-eight hours to make your arrangements in; to-day is Friday: on Sunday morning I shall come to fetch you; I might take you this evening—this very moment, but that is not convenient to me; only as you might probably be seized with a fancy for travelling between this and Sunday, a person, whom I can rely on, will not budge from here, and will follow you about, so that I may have no difficulty in joining you; as to your platonic lover, you may tell him from me, that I dispense with his visits...unless indeed he is inclined to make one to me, personally, and then—then. .what follows is nothing to you."

"You speak marvellously well, sir; and I will try to answer you with equal ability. Be at ease; I shall not take the trouble to fly, but I will never voluntarily return to you. In order to accomplish that, you must have recourse to force. A magistrate is the only person who can justify the employment of forcible means, and say, when justice is brought to bear, between us, how do you think the question will be decided."

"Ah! ah! ah! you really are a very clever and very deep lawyer, madame, but I fear much, you will lose your first cause. You mean to say, doubtless, that you will demand a seperation; I have thought of that; there is only one objection. It is not sufficient for a woman to wish for a seperation in order to be able to procure one; at the worst, you will plead for it. Well, then, we will set up our pleas; you will mention *Ursula*, I shall answer *Roche-gune*. The public voice accuses me; it will accuse you too, and we shall only be better suited than ever, on account of the similiarity of our positions."

"Sir, do not insult me by mentioning such a comparison."

"Oh this is charming...what because an old man almost in his dotage, his bigot of a wife, and a converted sinner like Madame de Richeville, will come forward to attest the purity of your connection

with Rochegune, you think *that*, all sufficient, well then, I shall give myself out, also as a hero of platonic love, and if there is any occasion for it, Mademoiselle de Maran and her friends will come forward to prove the angelic purity of my connection with Ursula ; upon my word it will be a most diverting sort of *proces*. This is all for the future, you understand....as to the present, *en attendant* the issue of it, a magistrate or in other words, a Commissioner of Police will advise you to regain immediately the conjugal *domicile*, my dear little lost sheep."

"I do not believe it sir."

"Ah bah !...and by what powerful philtre or what magic charm do you expect to subdue M. le Commissaire ?"

"By a very simple *proces* sir ; by laying before that magistrate the proofs positive, of your criminal connection with Madame Sécherin, and the culpable use you have made of my fortune."

"Proofs ! what an attestation from the Prince D'Hericourt, doubtless, and a certificate from the lovely and repentant Duchess."

"Better than that sir."

"Oh then it must be a dolorous production of poor M. Sécherin or his mother's *la femme de menage de la Providence* as Mademoiselle de Maran called her."

"Take care, sir," cried I, "take care ! perhaps there is really something providential in the sad fate of that family."

I could not help calling to mind the menaces of death that M. Sécherin had vowed against M. de Lancry.

"In truth, I think there must be something *providential* for poor M. Sécherin appears to me singularly *predestiné*," said my husband smiling at his own coarse *plaisanterie*.

"Sir I know not which I feel most strongly, indignation or disgust, so in one word, I will put an end to this scene ; the proofs, on the strength of which, I shall ask leave to retire to the Convent of *Sacre Cœur*, while waiting for our separation being——"

"The proofs ! madam, let me see them."

"Those proofs, sir, are the letters written by your own hand to a friend in Bretagne, giving the whole history of your connection with Ursula."

It was now M. de Lancry's turn to look stupified : then anger, shame, rage, and hatred bursting forth he grasped me by the arm and cried in a terrible voice :

"It will be the worse for you if you have read those letters."

I felt my courage rise with the emergency, and I replied, while I disengaged myself from the brutal grasp of M. de Lancry :

"I have read those letters sir !"

"You have read them !...and where are they. .where are they ?"

"In my possession."

"Oh!" cried he, looking around if to discover where they could be, "oh that is infamous treachery, and he shall pay for it, with his life."

Then putting his two hands clasped together on his forehead with an expression of frightful rage, and violently stamping his foot, he cried :

"Do not repeat that you have read those letters... I cannot answer for myself——"

I rang the bell instantly : my valet de chambre answered it.

"Remain in the anti-room," said I to him, with a firm voice, "I shall have some orders to give you almost immediately."

These words recalled M. de Lancry to himself, he walked up and down with agitation, and then coming towards me.

"But how did you get those letters into your possession? By Heavens I must know that immediately!"

"It can be of but little consequence sir, for you to know how I got them... the fact is certain, that they are in my hands, and that if you force me to do it, I shall make use of them."

"And you have already shown them without doubt," cried he with a sort of despairing shame, "you have amused your friends by letting them see, to what a degree Ursula tyrannized over me, and how unhappy she made me, oh what a triumph for you and your *imbecile* friends, doubtless you all laughed together at the agonies of my soul! it was a very ridiculous and foolish love, that love of mine, was it not? to ruin myself for a woman, who made fun of me—let me see," added he with a burst of convulsive laughter, "how many copies you and Rochegune have taken, and how many there are in circulation at this present moment?"

These base suspicions disgusted me.

"I have the misfortune and the shame of bearing your name, sir, that punishment is sufficiently humiliating to me without seeking to augment it."

"That is no answer. The letters? where have you put them, and how long have you had them?"

"After all, sir, I see no reason-why I should not tell you how they came into my possession. The two first were brought to me in a parcel, containing a bouquet of the same flowers that M. Lugarto had before offered me, by your desire, I have, therefore, every reason to believe that he sent them to me; how he got hold of them I cannot tell; as for the last letter, it came to me by the post."

"I have no longer any doubt Lugarto is secretly here," cried he, "they did not deceive me—they really saw him—and yet it was one of my servants, in whom I have perfect confidence, who put those letters in the post—and what is more, the person to whom I wrote them, has answered them as if he had received them."

"It would not be the first time that M. Lugarto had counterfeited your hand-writing, and bribed your servants, sir."

"Yes, yes, it must be so, by heaven! but why is he hiding himself? oh, if I can but find him out...as to his motive...if he wished to encrease the aversion I already felt for you, to the most implacable hatred, he has quite succeeded, do you hear? succeeded beyond his expectations. Death and madness! to think that you...you...you should have read thus my heart's history, my most secret thoughts; and to dare to confess it to me! why you did not consider that my execration of you would augment, in proportion to the advantage that those letters gave you over me, those letters! I tell you I must have those letters instantly."

"You forget, sir, that all those threats render them still more precious to me."

"Observe, Matilda, and do not drive me to extremities, since you have read them you must have remarked that when I wrote them my soul was steeped in bitterness, yet that is but trifling to what I feel at this moment; once more, do not drive me to extremities."

"Let us continue to live, as we have done, separately, sir, and those letters shall never be brought forward."

"I tell you that you must live with me; that it is more essential now than ever, do you hear me?"

"I shall employ every possible means to escape the dreadful alternative you propose to me."

"Why, I tell you, you are a fool, for, notwithstanding those letters, you will be obliged to follow me, and to remain with me to abide the issue of that *procès*."

"We shall see, sir, whether, in the face of such evidence against you, I shall not be permitted to retire into some safe asylum...into a convent...therefore, sir, I shall try my fate."

"That is your last word."

"It is my last word; however, for your own interest and for mine, for I have a horror, I confess to you, of raking up the past, listen to me; I repeat again that your determination of returning to me, can only be a threat, in order to force my consent to some proposal you have to make to me, on the score of money; perhaps you wish me to give up the pension that you settled on me, and which you have already reduced...if that is it...to spare you the degradation of playing any longer the odious part you are now doing. I consent."

He interrupted me with a fresh burst of rage-

"If I were reduced to the most abject misery, and you could load me with gold, do you hear? I would not renounce the rights that I have over you, and but for the imperious necessity which prevents it, it would not be the day after to-morrow, but it would be this very hour that I should take you away with me."

"Why this is the most ferocious madness," cried I, "it is impossible that we can ever live together again; you have just told me how much you hate me, and I despise you as much, what then can you want with me? there is some horrible mystery in this... but, thank God, I am no longer alone, I have friends now who will defend me."

Three o'clock struck.

"Three o'clock! already three o'clock!" said he, impatiently; then he added: "I must go; once more you refuse to come and live with me the day after to-morrow!"

"I refuse!"

"Take care."

"I refuse. I will yield only to force."

"You wish then for *éclat*, and scandal?"

"I cannot imagine, sir, what you can want with me! and now," added I, with terror, "I believe you to be capable of anything."

"Yes! yes!" exclaimed he, wildly; "I shall be capable of anything that will oblige you to follow me, because more than my life is concerned in that;" then, as if he feared he had said too much, he added, smiling bitterly, "because my happiness—my domestic happiness is concerned in it. My gentle Matilda, happy days await us; therefore, on Sunday morning—" he went off furiously.

\*            †            \*            \*            \*

As soon as he was gone the strength which had sustained me entirely gave way; I remained some time insensible—incapable of collecting my ideas.

As soon as I recovered from the shock I had experienced, I began to weigh calmly the consequences of the step M. de Lanery had now taken, what could be his reasons in wishing for a re-union with me I could not divine; however, that did not make me very uneasy seeing I was so determined myself never to accede to it.

The question therefore that remained to be solved was, whether he could force me? My men of business had often urged me to demand my separation, never doubting that I should obtain it with ease; I had always refused, having a horror of the scandal it would occasion, but it had never entered their heads or mine to imagine that M. de Lanery would ever have the audacity to propose living with me again.

It appeared to me impossible, that after reading the letters I had in my possession, I could be forced to return to live even temporarily with M. de Lanery, but on the other hand the law was sometimes so singularly unjust towards women, that I did not feel completely reassured. I therefore wrote instantly to a famous lawyer

who had done a great deal of business for Madame de Richeville and begged him to come and speak to me immediately.

After deep and prolonged reflections, the result of this terrible scene appeared to me almost like happiness, for it settled all my doubts and uncertainties respecting M. de Rohegune.

M. de Lancry had shown himself to me under such revolting circumstances, his pretended rights were so odious and terrifying to me that I felt indignant with myself for ever having instituted any comparison between his conduct and mine.

The course I meant to pursue was a plain and simple one, to plead for a separation from M. de Lancry, and that separation once obtained, to follow the dictates of my heart and in some unknown retreat to wait for M. de Rohegune, and consecrate to him the remainder of my life.

A legal separation, I should consider in the light of a divorce, and therefore feel myself completely free.

Doubtless it would be much more heroic to continue as I was before, but at last I came to the determination that it would be folly to push an exaggeration of my duties to such a pitch as that.

I should never myself have demanded the separation, but M. de Lancry obliged me to do so, therefore though painful to me in some respects, in others I hailed it with joy, since to that I should owe the happy futurity, which just before I was on the point of renouncing.

I had never felt my judgment more calm and decided than after that violent scene, I had never adopted a determination more promptly or more satisfactorily.

I did not blind myself to any of the facts ; I did not shrink from any contingency, however threatening it might appear.

I imagined the position of being forced to live with M. de Lancry till my proces was decided ; I felt certain I could bear that trial, sustained by the certainty of the happiness that was to follow it.

I went further still ; I imagined my case lost, and M. de Lancry master of my fate. But then the injustice would be so flagrant, the opinion of society, if they acquiesced in it, so revolting, that I should no longer feel any respect for it, or fancy that I owed it any duty—I should therefore without scruple, confide my life and destiny to the tender care of M. de Rohegune, and that without remorse, or without fear, appealing to God, and turning from the judgment of men to his supreme tribunal, the last refuge, the last hope of the oppressed.

Though I felt full faith in my own resolutions, yet, in order to engage myself irrevocably with M. de Rohegune, as well as to obtain his advice and support under such important circumstances, I wrote him these words in haste :

“ Come back...come back quickly, my beloved friend, this time

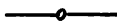
it will be for ever...I am yours for ever, my whole life will be devoted to you."

I called Blondeau and said to her—

"You must go to the Hotel de Rochegune; give this letter to the superintendant, and desire him, from me, to send it off instantly to his master by an express."

Hardly was Blondeau gone; when one of the servants of Madame de Richeville rushed into me, all in tears.

"For heaven's sake, madame," cried she, "come, mademoiselle, Emma is dying, and Madame de Richeville is quite frantic."



### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### CONSOLATION.

WHAT a sad spectacle offered itself to my sight. The most minute details of that scene are indelibly engraven on my heart. The curtains of Emma's bed and room were of white muslin, the shutters half closed, admitted only a feeble light in the apartment, one could hardly distinguish in the midst of the white draperies which surrounded her, the pale and angelic countenance of Emma, her light hair falling negligently in bands down her face, her large eyes, without expression, half closed, their long eye lashes throwing a shadow on her cheeks already hollow from illness, sometimes her lips moved feebly, her two small hands were crossed upon her breast in an attitude full of grace and modesty.

I had not seen Emma for two days, and I was frightened at the alteration I perceived.

Madame de Richeville kneeling by the side of the bed, held her in a convulsive embrace, covering with tears and kisses her eyes, her cheeks, her forehead, her hair.

One of her attendants, stifling her sobs, stood near the foot of the bed, holding a cup in her hands.

"Good God! what is the matter," cried I, throwing myself on my knees near Madame de Richeville.

She made me no answer, but redoubled her caresses.

I took hold of Emma's hand, it was dry and burning, her breathing appeared painful and oppressed, which was what caused Madame de Richeville so much alarm.

"Have you sent for the physician?" said I, in a low voice, to the femme de chambre.

"Alas! no, madame, Miss Emma's attack came so suddenly that we seem all to have lost our wits."

"Give me that cup, and go instantly for M. Gerard," said I to her.

She went immediately.

"Emma—Emma, my child, you do not hear me...Oh! my God, you do not know me, cried Madame de Richeville, sobbing, "I implore you...I beseech you...try to drink a little." turning round to take the cup, she perceived me.

"Ah, I told you so," murmured she, pointing to her child with a movement of despair. "Lost, lost, and I shall never survive her."

"Silence; in pity to her and yourself, silence."

"She does not know me, she will not now take anything from my hand...and yet this draught might be the means of saving her."

And she attempted to put it to the lips of the young girl, but with a gentle movement of her hand, she refused it.

"I told you so; she knows all...she despises me...she hates me. Oh, my God! she will die, cursing her mother."

And completely losing her reason, Madame de Richeville threw her arms up in despair; her sobs became convulsive, then they suddenly subsided, her tears ceased to flow, her strength failed her, and she fell down, a victim to a frightful nervous attack.

I rang for her women; they carried her into her own room; and I remained alone with Emma.

Doctor Gerard arrived soon afterwards. He desired to have an exact account of how she had passed the night—it had been a very restless and feverish one; in the morning Emma was rather drowsy; and when she awoke she looked at Madame de Richeville for some time; then she spoke some words which were unintelligible during the delirium of her fever; that attack having passed away, she had fallen into the state of torpor and insensibility in which we now saw her.

M. Gerard approached the bed, looked at Emma for some time attentively, and then listened to her impeded respiration.

I watched his countenance with anxiety; it was grave and anxious. After a moment's consideration he said to me:

"Madame, I should like to speak with you alone, since unfortunately the Duchess de Richeville is not in a state to listen to me."

I made a sign to the two women to leave the room.

"My God, sir" cried I "what is the matter with Emma?"

"The danger is great—very great,"

"Oh, sir, is there no hope?"

"I fear not, madame, our science is unfortunately powerless to cope against causes purely moral, which produce these physical prostrations of strength. In vain we attempt to fight against the effects, while we are ignorant of the cause of them, therefore, seeing the imminent danger of Miss Emma...I must—I ought—

Perceiving the hesitation of M. Gerard.

"Sir," said I to him, "I am the dearest friend of Madame de Richeville, and I love Emma as a sister. I can answer all your questions."

"That is why I asked you to send away the servants, what I have to say to you must be entirely confidential."

After another pause, he continued,

"I have attended Miss Emma both at *Sacré Cour* and here, her character always appeared to me *d'une exaltation concentrée*, her imagination very lively, her mind very sensitive, her candour extreme....I know not if I am mistaken."

"By no means, sir, both with Madame de Richeville and me, Emma has always been frankness itself."

M. Gerard reflected for a few minutes, and then continued.

"So Madame de Richeville has always told me, and that assurance, from a person who knew Miss Emma so thoroughly, was sufficient to drive away from my mind certain suspicions, which had come into it, and which I now bitterly regret, not having sooner confided to you."

"How is that, sir?"

"I shall have the honor of telling you; the cause of Miss Emma's illness is entirely mental, the frequent reveries in which she so often indulged, and her state of langour date from some time past; but these symptoms have assumed a much more serious character within the few last weeks; they have been alarming for the last few days, and dangerously so since yesterday. Now what remains for me to tell you, is a matter of great delicacy, but the life of this child depends upon it."

"Pray, sir, explain."

"Well, madame, you who have been in the habit of seeing Miss Emma every day, of living in habits of constant intimacy with her, have you never suspected that she had some penchant...some unrequited attachment?"

"Emma? oh no, sir...none whatever...but what could make you imagine such a thing?"

"I repeat, madame, that her illness has all the symptoms which are caused by some repressed attachment; I have often been on the point of naming to you my suspicions, but the Duchess and you, madame, both mentioned so often to me her extraordinary frankness, that you helped to drive away that idea."

After reflecting again for some little time, finding nothing to justify the suspicions of M. Gerard, I answered,

"No, sir, I cannot imagine that Emma has any unrequited attachment, I am even astonished at such a thought occurring to you, as are you as well acquainted, as I am, with the candour, simplicity, I might almost say childishness, of Emma's disposition, I

am sure it would have been impossible for her to hide such a secret either from Madame de Richeville or me!"

"That candour and childishness, madame, instead of dissipating my conviction, only strengthens it."

"How can that be, sir?"

"Perhaps she is herself ignorant of the penchant she feels...but in looking back, can you remember nothing in your intercourse with her, that however insignificant it might appear at the time, would, on reflection, serve to enlighten you now?"

"No, the more I think of it, the more improbable it appears to me; however, without entering into the particulars of a secret, which is not my own; I must tell you, that Madame de Richeville and I fear, that Emma has made a discovery relative to her family; and if it is so, it is one which would afflict that poor child most sensibly."

M. Gerard appeared more and more embarrassed, and not to pay much attention to what I said to him; he shook his head with an air of doubt, then again, going close to Emma, listened to her breathing, which seemed rather easier, felt her pulse, and said,

"She is very ill, very ill, indeed! as it is a mental cause alone which produces this illness, so we can only hope for a mental cure. . there are instances of patients reviving by the mere presence of the person, whose loss they were regretting; it must be some miracle of that sort which can alone save Miss Emma."

"Oh! sir, your frighten me," cried I.

"It is, however, but too true!" replied he; and I must first convince you of the imminent danger in which she is...as that consideration could alone reconcile me to the necessity of informing you of a strange communication, that I have received, in a very disagreeable manner."

"What can your mean, sir? of what communication do you speak?"

"This morning an unknown messenger brought me a little parcel containing ten notes of a thousand francs each, and a letter which I must, however unwillingly, shew you."

M. Gerard then read what follows.

*"These ten thousand francs are yours, if you will undertake to announce to Madame de Lancry, that Miss Emma de Lestanges, is dying for love of M. le Marquis de Rochegune."*

There are certain emotions, so painful, that they seem to deaden all feeling in you, this was the case with me at hearing this dreadful revelation.

I seemed to have received a frightful blow upon my heart, my ideas became confused, for a moment or two, I saw nothing...I heard nothing.

The room was dark, so that the physician did not perceive the alteration of my countenance ; he continued.

"I need not add, Madame, that the ten thousand francs were immediately sent to the hospital, but I regret that I had not announced my own convictions before, either to you or Madame de Richeville ; as at present it would appear as if I acted the part of agent to my mysterious informant ; I can only repeat what I have already said of Miss Emma's symptoms. but as I have not the honor of being acquainted with M. de Rochegune, I must ask you, madame, whether you have ever observed any preference shewn to him, and whether Miss Emma was in the habit of seeing him frequently."

"Yes, sir, she used to see him almost every day.

"And do you think that M. de Rochegune returns her attachment, or is aware of it?"

"I do not think he does, sir...no, I think not."

After a moment's silence, I said to the doctor, with an altered voice, and in a solemn tone :

"Then, sir, this child is really in danger of death, and it is a concealed passion which is killing her?"

"I believe so, madame, on my honor I believe it, and if there is a ray of hope for her, it would be in rousing her, by telling her that her love for M. de Rochegune was returned,

"Now, sir, for Emma's sake, I have a great favour to ask of you."

"Speak, madame."

"Will you give me that letter, and your word of honor that you will never mention to any one that you received it."

M. Gerard hesitated for a moment, not wishing to act without reflection, and then replied :

"My conscience will have nothing to reproach me with, the poor have profited by the money, and the communication I have made to you was absolutely necessary, I have therefore no objection to give the letter up to you, and to make you the promise that you exact from me."

"I thank you, sir."

"Reflect, madame well ! said the doctor to me in a grave and imposing manner, and returning to the bed of Emma—that you have a deep responsibility attached to you ; the moments are precious ; I must go and see the Duchess who is quite unfit to attempt to nurse her young relative at present, the fate of that poor child rests with you ; if you can give her any hope, let it be done as soon as possible—and with the greatest care—her *accès* of fever is diminished added he feeling her pulse ; perhaps the delirium is gone, if she could listen to you, and the brain is not already affected, she may still be saved."

"You are right sir—" said I with bitterness—"it is indeed a great—a very great responsibility! a most terrible one."

After looking at Emma again, the doctor said to me,

"I think I can see a tear on the eyelids—that is a proof of a slight amendment—as soon as she can listen to you, speak to her of M. de Rochegune, with reserve at first, and observe attentively what effect this produces on her."

"Yes sir! I will not fail to observe."

"Then, if you perceive that this name occasions in her any emotion, however slight it may be, you must give her hopes of seeing him soon...is he here?"

"No! no! sir, he has been absent some days."

"Ah! and it is just during that time that Miss Emma's illness has become so dangerous, doubtless it was *that* which brought on the last attack, you must therefore speak of his return...tell her that he will have pleasure in seeing her again...perhaps you must even tell her that he has guessed her feelings towards him, and partakes of them...for above all things we must think of saving her."

"Without doubt, sir; we must save her, said I almost mechanically."

"So, for example, if your words produce some un hoped for result you must put the decisive blow, even by giving her hopes of soon marrying M. de Rochegune...I repeat again she is in such imminent danger we must do all we can to save her...if this marriage is impossible, she must learn that afterwards, when there will be less danger, no one experiences two such attacks as this."

"You think not sir."

"Without doubt...if by a miracle she recovers, we must leave her in that conviction until she is quite re-established, and her recovery will be quick; for happiness is the best physician! in illness of the mind, it works wonders, therefore Madame I dare not say have hope—but have courage...no doubt your responsibility is great; but no one could be more fitted to undertake a task which requires so much delicacy, tact, and *dévoument*. You are the dearest friend of Madame de Richeville and almost like a sister to this poor child, the only chance that remains of restoring her to life could not be placed in better hands...this evening I will come again."

After having written some prescriptions, he went away; one of Madame de Richeville's attendants came and told me, that the Duchess continued in a most deplorably nervous state.

I desired her to return to her mistress, as Emma was sleeping,

I remained alone; alone with that unfortunate young girl, who, in her unconscious innocence, was striking, the most cruel blow I had ever experienced. Oh my God! thou knowest, I threw myself on my

knees by that dying bed and I prayed with fervour, for grace, to conquer the detestable thoughts, the instincts of homicide...yes homicide, for one may kill sometimes by a word, or by silence, as well as by the knife. "Almighty power, thou, to whom all thoughts are known, and from whom no secrets are hid, save me from myself."

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE REVELATION.

I WAS there alone...alone with Emma, waiting till she awoke... waiting for the lucid moment when I might question her heart, in order to discover *that*, of which she herself perhaps was ignorant...

And I...I...to announce it to her.

As I thought over the past, I was astonished at my own blindness. ...A thousand trifles, unnoticed at the time now crowded on my mind, amongst others, the emotion she experienced at the sight of snow...that snow which had almost proved the winding sheet of M. de Rochegune. Another, a later and fatal proof! had she not experienced all the sensations of the most lively jealousy, towards me?

And why should that love be improbable...was it not to be expected, was it not natural? seeing M. de Rochegune every day, hearing nothing but his praises, how could she avoid loving him?

For a moment I bitterly blamed Madame de Richeville for her imprudence. Poor unhappy mother! Then all the weight of my execrations fell on M. Lugarto.

Ah! he knew how to revenge himself, in an atrocious manner!

But how, could he, who had never seen Emma have discovered a secret unknown even to me, and Madame de Richeville; a secret that Dr. Gerard only suspected?

The Duchess believed all her servants to be faithful ones, but must not M. Lugarto have bribed some of them, but even then, how could they have read the heart of Emma, better than her mother, and better than I had?

In thinking this over, it was but too easily explained...I was entirely pre-occupied with my own love. Madame de Richeville herself took a lively interest in it, and the idea of Emma entertaining a passion, never entered our heads.

Could Emma have had a confidante amongst the attendants of Madame de Richeville? that was very improbable with such a disposition as her's...and they all seemed so devoted to her mother;

but alas ; gold is a powerful corruptor, and that M. Lugarto, did not spare.

Sometimes I opposed to the evidence of facts, reasons which appeared as powerful as immutable as the laws of nature.

"No ; no ; then cried I, Emma must not love M. de Rochegune, she must not ; that love would cause either her death, or my eternal unhappiness, that poor girl must not die ; and I must not be doomed to eternal unhappiness.

It was impossible for me to renounce that love, and go back to M. de Lanery ; it was impossible for me to have touched so nearly the height of felicity, and then to be thrust down into such an abyss. It was impossible for me to look forward to such an accumulation of misfortunes, they could never be heaped on the head one victim, God could never permit it ; what had I done, that I should be persecuted to such a degree ?

Then a voice, at once severe, yet paternal, seemed to answer,

"And that child, that angel who is dying ; what has she done ? her soul is so pure, that she is even ignorant of the love she feels ; she has told it to no one...she has suffered...she has faded away, but she has never complained, she *will* never complain, and yet she is dying !

"Like the flowers which fade and die, when deprived of the sun, though they are ignorant what the sun is...she has felt the love that would have sustained her life, fail her...and she has sunk under it...she had no need of subtle arguments and sophistry to justify her love...she was young and free...she loved a man young and free also ; her love might be sanctioned by the laws of God and man. She is but sixteen ; and she is dying.

"Close your eyes for ever, poor child ; your virgin love will be buried with you...do not fear...all the world will remain as ignorant of it, as you have been yourself ; to see those two small pale and thin hands crossed over your breast, one might imagine that an instinct of modesty, made you wish to hide that love, which the transparency of your soul could not conceal...sleep then...sleep on an eternal sleep...poor child." Then I felt my heart touched, I threw my eyes on the gentle and dying figure of Emma, she was lightly sleeping, her countenance so changed and sorrowful had yet at that moment an expression that was magnificent, of resignation, and candour...

"Oh ! my God !" cried I, falling on my knees, "she is very unhappy ; but at least she is ignorant of the cause of her unhappiness... whilst I...I should have to live in a state of eternal despair." Then reflecting how selfish was this consideration, suppressing my sobs, I mentally, begged forgiveness for it, from Emma.

Passing then into the contrary extreme of disinterested heroism ; methought the mysterious voice again addressed me.

"Courage!...courage! poor woman..." it said, "yours is a heavy cross, but one step more, and you will have gained the summit of Calvary..."

"From there...from that sublime height, in humble imitation of Christ, who on the cross, was the mediator between God and man; you may contemplate the child whom you will have saved, the mother who will bless you! as for the man so worthy of you, and whom you love so tenderly, of him you will say while you try to hide your tears..." *ah! if he knew!*

"Courage! oh, it requires more than human strength, thus voluntarily to assume the martyr's crown, but then what balm will be spread over your sorrows by the approving voice of conscience.

"You know not what religious consolations, will pour in upon you, you know not yet how you can suffer; but yet rejoice at the same time, while with streaming eyes, and lips trembling with sobs, you exclaim...*I am very unhappy, oh frightfully unhappy!...but at least they are happy those for whom, I have suffered so much!*

"Oh yes...be proud of that love, in whose cause you thus immolate your happiness, be proud of it, it is your first, your only, your noble love, behold the thoughts it inspires, the resolutions it suggests, instead of that absorbing jealousy which in another case, you felt towards Ursula.

"What are your feelings towards Emma? The purest, the highest of aspirations...she is dying of her love for the one you cherish...you will try to extort that secret from her closing lips...you will renounce in favour of her, your golden dream of heavenly happiness.

"Before, you only suffered passively, from an unworthy cause...the hour is come, when you must suffer, and act, from the most holy of motives. Clothe yourself with the divine mantle of virtue, do not shrink from the sacrifice demanded of you, save an innocent child from death, and make her happy...Courage! courage! it is God's will...and he will reward you for it in eternity."

\* \* \* \* \*

Alas! in the same manner as one turns from some culpable fascination or base counsels, so I endeavoured to close my heart, against the accents of that generous voice.

I was tired of suffering.

Why should I give that unhappy child, hopes, that M. de Rochegune would never realize? for did he not love me? love me to distraction, and my enormous sacrifice would, after all, fail to secure the happiness of that young girl.

In the midst of these bitter reflections, Emma made a slight

movement, turned her head languidly towards me, opened her eyes, and fixed them on me.

Oh I see, at this moment, that look, so penetrating, so gentle, so sad, so resigned...

It seemed to me as if imploring me to restore her, to life and happiness.

After regarding me with surprise for a moment or two, she shut her eyes, and two tears rolled down her cheeks, which were suffused by a pale blush, "Emma, what is the matter?" said I gently—"you weep!—do you suffer?"

"Yes," said she in a feeble voice, without opening her eyes, "I love you, and yet the sight of you does me harm—do not be angry with me...you must be lenient to the dying."

"What is that you say? do not allow such ideas to take hold of you, my poor child, you afflict yourself and your best friend."

"I know that I am going to die. God hastold me so in my dream."

"What dream?"

"Oh! a strange dream, continued she with her eyes still closed...I dare not tell it you."

"Emma, I beseech you to let me hear it."

"I thought I was dying; I felt within me a kind of sublime strength which seemed as if it would carry me to heaven...then... it seemed to me that I heard a voice which said, *must she die? must she die?*"

"And to whom was that voice addressed my child?"

"Oh! it was the effect of fever, my having those ideas, they are very foolish."

"But to whom did that voice speak when it said '*must she die?*'"

"To a woman...to a woman who was out of sight, said Emma hastily."

I understood...the poor child was deceiving me, it was I whom she had seen in her dream. And what reply did that woman make, said I to her.

She answered nothing...and then the voice said "*Emma, you must die!*"

Then reproaching herself for having been prejudiced against me, even in a dream, and recovering her usual gentle and charming manner, she opened her eyes, and regarded me this time with such an expression of repentant and ingenuous tenderness, that I could not restrain my tears.

She leant towards me, took my hand in hers, carried it to her lips, alas! they were cold—very cold...then she put it on her breast, saying...

It seems to me that the heat of your hand will warm my heart, which was quite cold before.

"Emma, you love me?"

"Yes, after my second mother, I love no one in the world so well as you."

"You love no one as well as me, my child?"

"No one...I should have liked to have resembled you in everything...to have been yourself."

"And yet sometimes you almost hate me," said I quickly.

She made a *brasque* movement and pressed my hand closer to her heart; I felt its feeble beatings quicken a little.

Emma replied, smiling sadly:

"You see what pain you give me, by saying that; I assure you that I love you...those sensations that I could not conquer on first seeing you I have discovered what they were," and she tried to smile again.

"And what were they?"

"It was an instinct of my heart which told me that I had caused you grief, then I hardly dared approach you, I felt a kind of remorse for my fault, but your tender goodness soon dissipated that feeling, and then I threw myself into your arms."

How was it possible for me not to be touched, by thus hearing Emma trying to explain the feeling of jealousy, she reproached herself with, and the cause of which she could not tell me.

"You believe me, do you not?" added she, "I swear to you that I do not hate you...at the moment that I am going to appear before God I should not tell an untruth."

"You always talk of dying, my child...happily there is no chance of it; but should you not be grieved to quit those who love you...to lose your life?"

"Oh! yes, I should be grieved to quit Madame de Richeville and you; but as for my life, I should not regret it."

"And why so?"

"Because, without any reason...oh, without any reason, I feel every day more and more unhappy, everything has become sombre around me...all my thoughts are sad and desponding."

"But before you became so unhappy?"

"Oh!" said she, joining her hands and raising to heaven her fine eyes; brilliant with a sort of ecstasy of remembrance, "oh, before that it seemed to me that I could live for ever; my days passed like a happy dream, all my thoughts were bright and cheerful—I was happy...oh, so happy, that it even appeared to me that one of these days I should have my mother restored to me, even though I knew that she was dead."

"And at your convent were you as happy, dear child?"

"At my convent it was another kind of happiness; the friendship of my companions, the kindness of Madame de Richeville, constituted that happiness, which, as well as my griefs, I could always explain to myself; but this happiness, much greater, much

more lively I experienced, without being able to explain either *that* or the grief that succeeded it."

"Perhaps it was joy, at having escaped from the convent, which made you feel so happy?"

"Oh, no, for I regretted my companions there, and as for Madame de Richeville, I saw her as often when I was at the convent, as I have since."

"Try then to remember, as well as you can, the exact time, when that felicity began, which so changed the aspect of your life; which seemed to give a fresh zest to your existence, and which threw on everything around you its own bright and beautiful colours. Is it not in that manner, you would describe what you felt?"

"Oh! yes, yes, that is exactly what I felt."

After a moment of the most painful indecision I added, in an altered and trembling voice:

"That happiness, did it not commence a short time after Monsieur de Rochegune's return to Paris, when you used to see him every day."

She looked at me with an expression of candour and celestial happiness.

I felt her heart beat quicker than it had beat yet, and she said to me, with a sort of astonishment of joy and passionate gratitude:

"Yes, yes, that is true... Oh! my God! that is true."

"And your unhappiness, did it not commence soon after my arrival?"

Alas! without doubt my despair gave to my words and to the expression of my countenance, the appearance of reproaching her, for Emma, raising herself half up in the bed, threw herself into my arms, and bursting into tears, hid her face in my bosom, exclaiming in a voice of despair:

Oh forgive me! forgive me!

Then having embraced me with convulsive energy, I felt that her strength was deserting her; with terror I replaced her head on her pillow, and I flew to get something to revive her.

She was deadly pale; her cheeks livid; her hands cold as marble.

The salts, which I made her smell, did not revive her; I put my hand on her heart, it had ceased to beat.

I put my cheek close to her half opened lips—I could not detect the slightest breath. I thought that I had killed her.

It was a terrible moment for me, I fell on my knees and cried—

"Forgive me. Forgive me, oh! my God! restore her to life, and I swear to sacrifice myself to her, to employ all the strength that remains to me, in working out her happiness, as if she were my sister... oh! merciful God, forgive me, and I will sacrifice myself, even should it cost me my life; but grant that I have not killed her, oh! grant that I have not caused her death."

After some moments of agonising suspense during which leaning

over Emma I watched the slightest breathing or the smallest movement, God granted my prayer ; she breathed gently...the circulation of her blood returned ; her cheeks, before livid, became only pale...she was living...God had accepted my sacrifice !! From that moment I felt I must bury my love at the bottom of my heart, as in a sepulchre.

I could no longer doubt that that unfortunate child was dying from the effects of love and Jealousy.

But he...he, for whom she was dying...how could I detach him from myself ; by what means could I make him feel an interest in her love, or induce him to return it ?

Then, I confess, my thoughts appeared to fail me. I could hardly collect sufficient strength to say to Emma what was necessary in order to save her...yes ! for my first consideration must be, to save her !

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE RECOVERY.

THE physician had left with me a very powerful cordial, desiring me to give it to Emma, if her prostration of strength rendered it absolutely necessary.

I held it to her lips ; after a moment, as if mechanically, she drank it off.

A few minutes afterwards, a slight flush coloured her cheeks, and she opened her eyes with astonishment, as if awaking from a dream.

Not wishing to give her time, to recall the painful impression that had caused her fainting fit, and hoping to strike at once, the decisive blow, I exclaimed "Wake up, wake up you lazy one, Monsieur de Rochegune is just arrived ; he is with Madame de Richeville."

Hardly had I pronounced the name of M. de Rochegune, than the beating of Emma's heart became so violent that I was frightened.

"M. de Rochegune returned ?" murmured she.

"Yes...yes !" said I, with a broken and hoarse voice, for I felt that each word I uttered was death to my own hopes..."yes, he is come back full of grand projects, in which you are concerned ; and which we were always talking of together, I loved him, for the love he bore to you, but we could not say anything to you about it, because there were obstacles, great obstacles, or you would have been apprised sooner of his intentions. Yes!...we thought of no one but you...and you fancied that I thought only of him, and that he thought only of me...it was on that account that you felt a

kind of resentment against me, which you could not comprehend... it was jealousy, do you hear my poor child ! the most unjust jealousy, for Mr. de Rochegune loved you as much as you loved me, though he had not declared his love to you, yes he loves you ! you can no longer doubt it...he is come to ask your hand in marriage of your second mother, she consents, so you will pass the remainder of your life with him ; but you must hasten to get well, and to regain your roses...and now, will you talk any more of dying ?

I must not attempt to describe the thousand gradations of various feelings, which overspread that poor suffering countenance, while I thus spoke, surprise, joy, astonishment, fear, ecstasy, were all by turns painted there, with a vivacity and energy that frightened me. Yet I had foreseen that under such critical circumstances, to prepare Emma gradually, for what I had to tell her, would have destroyed the effect hoped for, by the sudden re-action, which revealing the whole at once, was likely to occasion.

Emma was saved !...but I could not at first realize that happy conviction ; the struggle was terrible, and for some hours I remained in agonizing doubt.

Faintings and delirium, succeeded each other, during which Emma murmured many unconnected sentences, but in them all, I distinguished my name ; accompanied by these words "forgive me my guardian angel."

From a most powerful instinct of delicacy, she never pronounced the name of M. de Rochegune. The crisis terminated happily by her falling into an undisturbed sleep.

The physician arrived the moment Emma had fallen asleep.

I, in my turn, was now almost overcome.

Well Madame ? said he with anxiety.

Without answering I motioned to him to observe Emma, and then hiding my face in my hands, I burst into tears.

After some moments passed in ascertaining the state of Emma, M. Gerard exclaimed with an expression of indescribable joy.

"She is saved," you have spoken to her...ah ! madame it is quite a resurrection, a miracle, and a most admirable one, she owes her life to you...a sudden re-action has had the most favourable effects, she is sleeping soundly, and for five days and nights past her repose has been nothing but stupor. "But how did you break the news to her, Madame ?" I told him I had announced to Emma the pretended return of M. de Rochegune, he shuddered at first, but afterwards re-assuring himself, he said to me. "You have had more courage, Madame, than I should have had myself ; that young girl, was dying, nothing but this could have saved her, there is every reason to hope now, that her recovery will be rapid, but Madame in order to ensure that, it is of the utmost importance, that you should continue to watch over her...she may imagine perhaps a little time

hence that she is only the sport of a dream, then will be your time to give credence to what you have told her by re-assuring her in all the details, and above all madame, you must prevent her suspecting that she has been imposed on--the relapse *that* would occasion, would certainly be fatal. M. de Rochegune is not here. He should be sent for; his nature is one, which would prompt him to lose no time in such a cause."

I thought of the letter I had sent him by the courier telling him to return immediately, and I said :--

"M. de Rochegune is sent for sir, and I doubt not he will be here, the day after to-morrow."

"Already sent for--and by you"--said M. Gerard.

Astonished at that remark, I answered,

"He could only have been sent for, by me, sir."

"True, Madame, we must now persevere in our work with courage.

"I almost fear my courage will fail me, sir."

"You will regain it, by reflecting that should it fail you now, all that you have already accomplished, will be useless; when Miss Emma awakes, if you are not at hand to prevent it, she may question one of Madame de Richeville's attendants, who cannot be let into the secret, and then all is lost.

"But, Madame de Richeville, sir?

"I have just seen her, I have ordered her a soothing draught, and she is now asleep; besides she has passed three nights watching by the bed-side of Miss Emma; she is overcome with fatigue, so there is nothing to fear on her account, if you do not wish her to share in your secret at present."

"More than ever, sir; I wish, nay I conjure you, to let this secret remain sacred, between you and me."

"I have promised, Madame; but how, when Miss Emma is quite recovered, can we prevent her speaking to Madame de Richeville of Monsieur de Rochegune, and her intended marriage with him."

"Hold, sir," cried I, interrupting him, "I have but one fear... it is, that I shall lose my senses, you do not know...you cannot guess, all that I have gone through to-day, my brain will fail me; what are the symptoms of madness, sir? is it one of them to feel every artery beat as if it would burst, mine beat in that manner, now, sir?

"Madame."

"Is it to feel one's understanding vacillating, like the expiring flame of a candle, at this moment I feel that, sir?"

M. Gerard has since told me that he was for an instant frightened by the wildness of my looks, and that, knowing what he did, he began really to fear, I should not have physical strength sufficient to sustain me in the conflict that the sacrifice I was about to make would entail upon me."

"Madame, calm yourself," said he, "lean upon my arm, and come to the window, I will open it, for in such a magnificent evening the breath of pure air, which will enter the room, must be beneficial to our poor invalid."

The physician opened a window which looked out upon the garden.

It was the end of March, just the beginning of spring, and the evening was warm, the moon shone brightly, surrounded by a host of stars.

I inhaled that reviving air, I bared my burning forehead to the soothing and gentle breeze. By degrees I became calm, I lifted up my eyes to heaven with grief, but with resignation.

In contemplating that immense firmament it seemed to me that a mysterious link was re-established between God and me, it seemed to me as if that voice, which had already counselled me, was again sustaining me, it seemed to say :

"Courage—courage—noble woman, you have nearly accomplished your sublime sacrifice—you cannot suffer more than you have done already, do not therefore leave your work incomplete, trust in God, he will inspire you, he will give you the power of vanquishing obstacles which at present appear insurmountable—he never abandons those who trust in him—and those who suffer the most, are those whom he loves the most ; his spirit guides them and enlightens them—his strength sustains them."

These thoughts did me good...they were a balm to my soul, as the pure air had been to my burning temples.

"You feel better, do you not madame?" said the physician after a long pause.

His voice appeared to me to falter with emotion ; the moon shone full on his countenance, and I observed two large tears, stealing down his cheeks.

"What is the matter, sir?" said I.

"You have enjoined silence on me madame—but happily there are no secrets from the eye above—and he pointed upwards towards heaven.

Did M. Gerard then know of my attachment to M. de Rochegune, had he learnt it since the morning? I could not guess.

He was a man who mixed but little in the world, or concerned himself with its reports or its scandal.

Perhaps then, till that moment he was not aware what rendered my task so painful to me.

After giving a few directions relative to Emma, he left me.

I remained alone with Emma, waiting till she awoke.

After three hours of sound sleep, she roused herself.

If the perfect conviction, that I had saved that unhappy child, from dying, was sufficient to satisfy me, on that score I could have

no doubt; the change that had taken place in Emma during that refreshing sleep was perfectly extraordinary. She was no longer the same being. Hope had saved her, and the conviction that she was as much beloved, as she loved.

Alas! I trembled to think what might be the consequences of the falsehood I had been obliged to invent—I closed my eyes to shut out the abyss—and I placed my trust in God.

When she awoke, Emma, collecting her thoughts, exclaimed,

“Is it true, oh, tell me, is it true?”

“Yes, yes, my child it is all true...you love M. de Rochegune, and he loves you—we will talk over your happiness afterwards, but tell me how you find yourself?”

“I feel my weakness now—but I have as strong a wish to live, as I had just now to die.”

“You feel very happy then?”

“Oh! yes, for I feel now, that it was to M. de Rochegune I owed those moments of felicity, that I could not explain, and I feel also, that I shall never experience again those moments of chagrin when I appeared to hate my life.”

She paused a moment leaning her head on her hands, then she resumed;

“It is strange; how, what you have told me, makes me see everything that has happened in such a different light—and yet I had certainly remarked that when he was present, I felt so much happier—I was far from attributing to him, the different emotions which filled my heart, only whatever he said I remembered. The airs that he sung, I sung also, it appeared to me that I had an echo to his soul in mine—when I heard him praised, it gave me as much pleasure as if I had been praised myself; when I accompanied him on the piano, I was sure to play much better than usual, when he talked to me instead of feeling shy, my thoughts and words flowed more easily than ever.”

“And why did you never speak of this to Madame de Richeville or me?”

“That is true, I cannot think why I did not;” said she after some little reflection, “but I believe it was, because it seemed so natural to me, that it never occurred to me to remark it. To be happy in his presence, was as much a thing of course, as living, breathing, feeling; In short, I was like a person, who enjoys all the blessings of God—without recognizing in them that they come from God—only, when my felicity was troubled by some fear or some souvenir I could not conceal my sadness—now I comprehend why the sight of snow made me weep—it was because M. de Rochegune had nearly perished in it.”

“But before I arrived he spoke sometimes of me, with Madame de Richeville, did he not?”

"Oh! yes, continually, he cited you as the most accomplished person, and the one he loved the best; it was on that account I loved you so much before I knew you, then I was so happy when I saw you. M. de Rochegune had been expecting your arrival with such impatience—but—"

"But what? my poor child; you must tell me all now."

"Why, then, without being able to explain why, I must confess, that when I saw you so constantly with him, I felt myself thoughtful, sad—oh, then, I often wished to die; but what is the use of recalling all those past griefs, my involuntary aversion to you, for which above all, I am ready to blush; oh! pray forget all about it, and love me as you always did."

"Yes—yes; we must try to forget the past; that is also my ardent wish."

"But I must never forget that I owe my life to you," exclaimed Emma.

"In return you can do much for me, my dear child."

"How?"

"By placing in me the most perfect confidence, by listening to my advice, and following my counsels, assuring yourself above all, that I wish only to ensure your happiness."

"Oh! I am quite convinced of that—and I readily promise to do all you wish."

"In that case—your marriage—with M. de Rochegune will soon take place—perhaps even sooner, than you could have expected; some obstacles of no great importance still exist, but they will be easily overcome; you have however been so ill, and are still so weak, that you must not think of seeing him, for some days to come; the sight of him would cause you emotion, that might in your present state be dangerous to you."

"Oh! no—I am sure the sight of him would cure me at once."

"But you must consider what he would feel, in seeing you so much altered, for you know it is since he left, that your illness so rapidly gained ground."

"Yes—when he went away, it seemed to me as if I had received the final blow—everything appeared dead around me, I closed my eyes, and I prayed to God to recall me to himself; but in his mercy he has spared me, and sent a guardian angel to watch over me."

And she kissed my hands with the utmost tenderness.

"Allow me then to guide you, my child—and above all, do not cause M. de Rochegune so much affliction"

"I cause him affliction."

Yes! without doubt, were he to perceive the traces of your sufferings, he would reproach himself with having caused them by his silence. I wish you therefore not to receive him till you have

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An unexpected Visitor

regained all your former health and beauty. There is another very important consideration, my dear Emma, which I must mention to you—Madame de Richeville your second mother wishes for your marriage with M. de Rochegune, but not aware of your feelings, and thinking you still very young—she has not thought proper to communicate her projects to you...she had confided them to me, begging me particularly not to let you know them. My desire to communicate the good news to you, thinking it might have a beneficial effect on your health, has caused me to be guilty of a great act of indiscretion, you must not, my dear child, make me repent it, so you must promise me not to speak before our friend of all that I have confided to you...she will not fail soon, to announce it to you, but you must not appear to know her plans before hand. It is no falsehood that I ask you to tell...it is only to be silent, so that Madame de Richeville may not have to reproach me, with having betrayed her secret, and above all, deprived her of the pleasure of announcing to you a marriage, which is so agreeable to the wishes of you both."

"I will do what you desire...it will be the first time that I have dissimulated, but my desire to obey you will prevent any indiscretion on my part."

"That is not all, my poor Emma"—said I trying to smile..."I am going to inflict on you more dissimulations."

"How so?"

"Monsieur de Rochegune loves you tenderly; but he has not dared to make that avowal to you, before he ascertained from Madame de Richeville, if she had any objections to make to what he so ardently desired, you must therefore before M. de Rochegune assume the appearance of being completely ignorant of his intentions; and even, after he has become your husband, you must keep the secret on my account that I have confided to you to day...you must feel that it would not be proper he should ever know, that I anticipated his declaration to you...even before he had made it."

"Oh, no! I understand all your solicitude for me...and that shall be our own secret between ourselves;...added she with naive joy."

"On that account you must not in the slightest degree alter your manners towards M. de Rochegune."

"But now that I know that I love him—and that he loves me—how shall I be able to conceal it from him?"

"Do not attempt to hide any of your impressions from him, my dear child; be natural and ingenuous, it will be the best means of continuing to please him, if any unforeseen event obliges me to go away for a time. and you wish to ask my advice on any subject...before you can consult with Madame de Richeville, you

can write to me by my good Blondeau, whom I will send to you, from time to time...and I will answer you by the same means."

"Without letting Madame de Richeville know it," said she, with an air of astonishment, as if that degree of mystery was repugnant to her upright and truthful character.

"You forget my child! that Madame de Richeville must know nothing of all this, you know me well enough to be certain that I would never engage you to do a wrong action."

"A wrong action! how could such a thought enter your head; on the contrary, I shall feel so happy in communicating all my fresh sources of happiness to you; but are you going away soon, and for long?"

"No—I hope not."

"Oh, you should not desert your Emma, who owes everything to you."

The day was beginning to break, and soon after, Emma again fell asleep.

Overcome by fatigue, and the various emotions I had sustained, I also gave way to sleep.

The next morning I was awake by Blondeau; it was nearly twelve o'clock, and she brought me a letter from Monsieur de Rochegune, saying to me:

"M. de Marquis was not at Rochegune, madame, he was at his estate near Fontainebleau; they forwarded your letter to him there—he is just arrived."

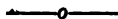
I opened the letter with fear and trembling, and read these words:

"Our destiny will soon be accomplished; there are some kinds of joy, so sacred, so overwhelming, they almost resemble prayer. When I had read your letter, I threw myself on my knees, and wept! At what hour shall I come to you?"

I wrote in haste these words:

"At one o'clock I shall expect you!"

At one o'clock M. de Rochegune was with me.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE RETURN.

MONSIEUR DE ROCHEGUNE's first impulse was to throw himself at my feet, take hold of my hands and bathe them with tears of joy; he, who in general exercised so much self-command was no longer master of himself; he appeared to be a prey to the most frantic joy; never had I seen his countenance lighted up by such anima-

tion, giving evidence of the immense happiness, and unlooked for felicity, which filled his soul.

My eyes were dry—burning ; I had exhausted my tears ; I felt stupified. I could not imagine what reason I must give M. de Rochegune when I announced to him the failure of all his hopes.

His first feelings of agitation over, he looked attentively at me, then, only, he perceived for the first time, the ravages that grief had occasioned.

After contemplating me for a moment with the tenderest interest he said, sadly :

" I see—your resolution has cost you much ; I can understand it—but I am proud of having triumphed over your struggles. Oh ! by what a thousand proofs of tenderness I will repay you, for all the tears it has cost you...those tears, which I trust, dear Matilda, are the last you will ever shed."

" I wished——"

" Oh, no !" said he, interrupting me with the volubility of happiness ; " tell me nothing more ; do not speak ; let me only look at you, and admire you with the covetous joy, that the miser feels when he has at last found the treasure he had been long seeking in vain ; let me realize the idea that the woman, who has so long been my *ideal wife*, and the dream of my childhood and manhood is now about to be really my own ; the woman, whom everything seemed for a time to combine together to separate me from, she is before me : she belongs to me ! Oh ! I could hardly believe it ; and yet something whispered to me, that love such as ours *must* end in bliss ; at other times I feared your scruples...then I was in despair. Oh ! those days, passed away from you, were dreadful ; you can have no idea of the horrible thoughts that suggested themselves to my mind when I remembered that in a few days I might have to say, ' Matilda...farewell...and farewell for ever.' Oh, you must never know how much I suffered ; you would reproach yourself too much for having made me so miserable."

" Believe me, I shall always feel remorse in thinking of the grief that I have caused you," said I, mechanically.

" But then, Matilda, I should be unjust if I did not tell you that if I had dreadful days of doubt and fear, I had also some of the most delicious hopes...it was in one of those moments that delighting, like a child in building castles in the air, I formed a plan for a delicious retreat for us at Castellamare...as you are so fond of Italy."

" My friend, I..."

" Forgive me, Matilda, I know we have a thousand plans to settle of more importance than this, a thousand resolutions to decide upon. What shall we say to our friends ? shall I set off before, or

after you ? who will you take as a chaperone for that journey ? Oh, my poor head, usually so firm and collected, turns wild at the thought of so much felicity...it is not my fault if I am quite bewildered, it is owing to the burst of happiness that has come upon me...But, good heavens, Matilda, what a sad and troubled mien you have ; I can imagine you would not be wild with joy, as I am, but at least let me see a smile upon your lips, one tender glance from your eyes. In truth, Matilda, the more I look at you, the more I am struck with it...why I have never seen you with an air so sombre...so almost threatening. What have you yet to teach me ?

" Oh ! very sad, very serious things."

" I do not understand you, what can have passed ? did not your letter say to me... ' Come...come ?' "

" Oh, cease...and, for pity's sake, do not remind me of that letter."

" Not remind you of that letter ? and why not ? "

" Since I wrote that letter," replied I, with downcast eyes avoiding to look at him, " I have seen M. de Lancry."

" Your husband, and where ? "

" Here, in my own house."

" Here ! he has dared to come to you, and for what ? for some new scheme of iniquity no doubt ; but of what consequence is your husband...you are separated for ever from him—what can he now have to do with you...you feel nothing towards him but the hatred and contempt he so well deserves...what signifies his coming ! It is a fresh proof of his *cynisme*, that is all."

I felt myself ready to die, the moment was come for me to strike the terrible blow, to take away from M. de Rochegune, not only all hope for the present but also for the future, to kill by one word all his love for me, without that my sacrifice would be useless.

In order to induce him to marry Emma he must have lost his love for me, he must not retain the smallest hope of ever being loved by me. " Oh ! my God ! grant me strength and courage."

" But, once more, Matilda," replied M. de Rochegune, " of what consequence can your husband's visit be ? perhaps you allowed yourself to be frightened by his threats."

" Threats ! no, I should have felt less, had he threatened me."

" What do you mean ? "

" That on the contrary he came to me, trembling, unhappy, with words full of repentance and tenderness."

" And you believed in that hypocritical repentance ? you have perhaps even felt, since that, some scruples arise in your heart ? you have been the dupe of this farce—"

" I assure you that M. de Lancry spoke with sincerity, and with the utmost respect and consideration for me, he acknowledged his past

faults, with such generous frankness, that, without being able to excuse, one could not help forgiving him."

M. de Rochegune looked at me with astonishment. The friendly manner in which I spoke of my husband confounded him, then he cast down his eyes, and said in a touching manner.

"I see how it is, I guess it all! your generous nature believes in this repentance, impossible as it is, because it relieves you from hating him...well then, like you, I think we need no longer hate or despise him...we have but to forget him, forgetfulness of those who have injured us, is the best vengeance of happy hearts."

"It was not only to express his profound grief at having deserted me that my husband came to me—he said 'he pretended that... that as we were not separated by any legal act, I might...'"

M. de Rochegune interrupted me quickly. Alas! to put the finish to my perplexity the same thought struck him, as had struck me, and he continued:

"Well, so much the better, after all he is right; your position and mine will both be improved, a separation of persons and property amounts almost to a divorce; by that means you will be quite out of your husband's power," then he paused and said to me: "Oh! now I can now comprehend your sadness, you fear, with reason, the scandal of such a proceeding, not on your own account, for you can only gain, by having your conduct investigated in open day: but you feel for the infamy of the man whose name you bear, and the publicity which will be given to it by this proceeding. It is true that will be so? but it is also true that justice must have its way at last...you have been long enough made the sacrifice; think only, that, that formality once got through, the liberty of your future life is legally assured, the last doubts that were lingering in your mind upon your *moral rights* will thus be dissipated."

My state of torture became intolerable, I made a great effort to collect all my strength, and I said to M. de Rochegune with a dry and husky voice:

"It is impossible for me any longer to allow you to remain in the error in which you are...I wrote you a letter; in that letter I told you to come back...that I accepted the offer you made me—hardly was it despatched when M. de Lancry presented himself."

"Well!"

"Then, I must confess...touched by his remorse...his tenderness...his misfortunes, his protestations, overcome by recollections of past times, notwithstanding all...I...I...promised never to quit him again.

I had spoken these words as if each word scorched my lips—without daring to look up at M. de Rochegune, and with an agitation that is indescribable.

After some minutes alarmed at his silence, I looked up, he seemed to be studying my words, not with stupor or despair; but with a kind of uneasy curiosity.

At last he said very coldly :

"I have perfectly understood what you have said...I am sure that you are incapable of joking, on such an occasion as this : your voice is trembling, your countenance is bewildered, your agitation frightful ; and yet, my dear Matilda, you must perceive if you look at me, that I do not believe a single word that you have said to me."

"You do not believe it?"

"It is impossible for me to believe it, because it *cannot* be, and *it is not so*."

"I can understand how such a mind as yours must look upon such weakness as impossible, but..."

"I am not going to analyze, or to draw any comparisons ; I simply tell you that it neither *can* be nor *is* it so ; but what makes me uneasy is the state of agitation in which I see you ; as to the cause of it, I cannot guess it at present, but I shall find it out soon."

"Ought I not naturally to feel overcome, trembling, and desponding, when knowing myself to be the victim of a sentiment that I cannot conquer, I make so ill a return for your love."

M. de Rochegune shrugged his shoulders, and said to me with a degree of sang froid which overcame me :

"Of course, Matilda, you must have some very strong motive to receive me in the manner you have...happily however for me, I have studied human hearts, and yours especially, too long to be deceived by those appearances...the sentiments you before expressed to me, were your *true* ones."--

"But--"

"But--my dear Matilda in four and twenty hours a woman cannot change as you pretend to have done ; at this moment I do not believe one word of the fable of the visit of your husband, and I know that you hate him, and condemn him, as much now or more, than ever. this is the truth!"

"You think me then guilty of falsehood!"

"Most certainly I do, but for some great and glorious end --and I am now certain that hid under that falsehood, there is some mysterious act of devotion--yes--very noble and grand, no doubt, for it requires a great compensation, to make up, for all you expose yourself to. But happily for you, you are no longer alone, Matilda, the care of your happiness devolves upon me, and I shall watch over it, I will defend you against yourself. It is allowed that I have a good share of penetration--before four and twenty hours my poor Matilda, your secret will be discovered"

I was at once touched to weeping, and yet alarmed at finding how

nearly he guessed the truth, it was necessary however to detach him from me, by taking all hope from him, and above all to prevent his thinking that I was sacrificing myself, for the sake of another.

In order to accomplish this, it was necessary that I should feign a passionate love for M. de Lancry, so as to take away from M. de Rohegune all illusions on that score.

M. de Rohegune's heart, once free, I thought he could not fail to appreciate the angelic disposition of Emma, and I should at least have the bitter satisfaction of having caused their happiness.

I therefore said to M. de Rohegune :

"Your incredulity does not astonish me, my conduct is so culpable, even in my own eyes, that I do not wonder you cannot believe it possible, pardon me for speaking of the past...but you yourself admitted the possibility of separation, you even proposed it."

"No doubt I did, and notwithstanding your letter pressing me to come, had I, on my arrival, found you again changed and irresolute, I could have comprehended it, and should have trusted to time and my own influence to bring you back to your promises—but to suppose that I can be fool enough to believe, that you, Matilda, have suddenly fallen in love with M. de Lancry during the short time of my absence! I could as easily believe you capable of having twenty lovers at once, as I could, that you should debase yourself by such an unheard of proceeding."

"And why should it be so base?" Is he not my husband? he repents of the grief, he has caused me? Is it not generous to forgive him? and besides you have seen, notwithstanding my *penchant* for you, I still remained obstinately attached, to my duty; the reason was, that I loved you only as a brother; you inspired me with no feeling warmer than friendship; my love, not extinguished, for my husband was the foundation of my virtue."

M. de Rohegune was far superior to most men, but yet he felt in a perceptible manner that mortifying wound to his self-love.

"This is enough to shake one's faith in everything," he exclaimed, with a gesture of horror that he could not restrain. "You . . . You—to speak so to me; but notwithstanding all you say I will still affirm that no infatuation, no fatality, no excuse in the world, can justify your loving that man, and that it is impossible you can do so unless you are as infamous and degraded as he is himself."

I admired his noble indignation, but in order to sustain the sad task I had imposed on myself, it was necessary to persist in affirming my love for M. de Lancry.

How fervently I thanked heaven for having given me strength hitherto to conceal from M. de Rohegune the passionate love that I felt for him, if I had confessed it to him, how could I tell him without dying with shame, that M. de Lancry had inspired me

with a fresh passion ; oh, no ! M. de Rochegune would never have believed it, and I should never have been able to attempt to persuade him of it.

He walked up and down the room with hasty strides ; he was evidently suffering. I hastened to abridge this most painful scene.

" You are unjust," said I, " to accuse me of perversity because a love unfortunately bestowed, I allow, but still legitimate, is re-awakened in me : have I not already sacrificed everything for that man, the sight of whom, I confess, has an irresistible power over me ; until the moment that I met him again, I was calm and courageous ; but when I witnessed his unhappiness, when I saw him repentant at my feet, when I heard his voice, when his eye again met mine, oh, then dignity, courage, former resolutions all fled...and with joy I embraced my chains again."

" Why this is quite horrible ; there is *cynisme* even in avowing such shameful influence, you must be mad ! I neither recognise you, or believe you."

" Nevertheless if there is any one who ought to believe me, it is you ; for I speak to you with perfect frankness, to my other friends I shall say, that pity for my husband and a desire of fulfilling my duty, led me to return to him, but to you, I say the real truth, that a passion stronger than I can combat, draws me to him, it is fatal, it is involuntary, but so it is !"

" Why this is perfectly infamous, Madame—I love you—and you have told me that you love me."

" And who says that I do not love you, which of us first broke the compact of our virtuous love, you or me ? was it not you ? well then ! because in a moment of weakness and compassion I imprudently wrote the word "*come*" is that to remain an irrevocable promise ? have you not told me yourself that on your return from your travels if you had found me living happily with my husband, you would not have blushed to avow your loyal attachment for me ? nothing therefore is changed, my affection for you is still as pure, as sisterly, and who has any right to throw blame on me ? our friends will all rather applaud my forgetting the faults of my husband, and returning to him when I see him deserted and unhappy."

" Well then— for the sake of humanity, acknowledge, that you are a victim to that fatal error, the desire of being admired and praised !—the rage of heroism ! the exaggeration of virtue, as some practise the exaggeration of vice ; but out of pity to yourself and me, never say that an irresistible love throws you into that man's arms ! do not say he is your husband ; he is so no longer, his infamous conduct has raised between him and you an insurmountable barrier—you may feel for him pity, mercy, and goodness, every sentiment except love."

" And yet that is the only feeling that draws me to him—cried I, to

"And yet that is the only one that draws me to him," cried I, to put an end to this cruel scene. "Yes! you may despise me: but in him I love the first man who taught my heart to beat with love—I love him as my husband—and I love him, as my lover—yes! as my lover, and it is on that account that I am determined to return to him."

M. de Rochegune hid his face in his hands and remained some-time silent. Then he said in a low voice and as if thinking aloud.

"That is very strange? I always said so: but yet I never thought it...it was necessary that I should see what I have seen."

"What is the matter," cried I, frightened at his wild manner, "what is the matter with you?"

"An extraordinary sort of phenomenon is taking place in me,—Matilda," continued he, as if talking to himself...yes...yes...my hopes, my convictions, all are slowly vanishing away, they fall like the dead leaves in autumn, without an effort, and instead of leaving a painful wound, there is nothing but a cold dry void...neither the violence of anger, or despair, no! only a bitter disdain mixed with a painful compassion, all the past that I believed unalterable, crumbles away and is effaced, how is that? Why because I mistook for imperishable marble, the snow which melts at the first rays of the sun, once more, that seems strange, just now when I thought that I should be forced to renounce that adored woman, the mere supposition appeared to me an abyss that I could not contemplate without shuddering, but now, instead of agony, instead of a frightful abyss, I see nothing but a mass of mire and mud from which I hasten to turn away my eyes: and yet it is I...I...myself—I who, for ten years past, have fed upon that love, that fixed that absorbing idea, which sustained me in danger...prompted me to all that was great and noble...I, who wept with delight yesterday at the thought of realizing my dreams of happiness, I who felt a joy almost divine in the anticipation! yet now, suddenly nothing. nothing remains, a breath has blown it all away, it has disappeared leaving not a trace behind, not a vestige...not even a ruin, say...say is not that very strange Matilda?"

Nothing could be more agonising to me, than to hear him thus analyze the total *renversement* of all his faith and hopes in me, once again I was on the point of telling him I was deceiving him, and how much I loved him! must I confess it? It was only his contemptuous resignation which discouraged me from doing so, and yet that contempt on his part, was the very result I required, for the furtherance of my object.

He continued, addressing himself to me:

"This would be incomprehensible with any other disposition but mine, but such is my character that the most subtle and rapid poison could not act with more certainty than does my contempt

when it is once excited, extinguish my love, however fervent it may have been."

Then briskly rising, "after all," said he, "human nature, is but human nature still, I ought to feel pity for your folly, when I consider the good qualities you possess to redeem it, I ought not to cast to the winds all remembrance of ten years of devoted and holy love, but I cannot help it, I know myself, I am always in extremes, I can only see in you the divinity I have worshipped, or a mere common place vulgar woman: while you were elevated on the pedestal of my belief in your virtue I could not help adoring you, now that you have most shamefully descended from it, you are nothing more to me than any other woman, I retract all my former adoration."

"So," said I, with bitterness, "if I had listened to you, when you entreated me to forget my duty, contempt without doubt, would have been my requital for that sacrifice, in the same manner as you now renounce all your late adoration, for in that case I should equally have descended from my high pedestal, I yield to a legitimate attachment, and you despise me, but if I had yielded to a guilty one?"...

This reflection seemed to strike him! he remained silent and pensive, then he exclaimed with a degree of violence he could hardly master:

"I told you some time since, that if ever I had occasion to doubt you, I should doubt myself, well! that time is come, I doubt myself...I doubt everything; Oh! unhappy woman for inspiring me with aversion, when you fulfil a sacred duty; unhappy woman for feeling so perverted, even tho' a legitimate love. Yes, I should feel less contempt for the hypocrisy of vice than for your virtuous bravado."

And he left the room precipitately.

At that moment my sacrifice was entirely accomplished.

I felt his affections had escaped from me, I had no longer any doubt, his heart was void, who would next occupy it?

A terrible thought occurred to me, "Ursula! cried I, if she tries her seductions on him? now that he is free, his heart embittered, he believes in evil, since he doubts even me, may he not at such a time be tempted to fall a prey to the fatal influence of that woman."

And Emma! the child to whom I have promised his love! Emma will die without it!...can she ever struggle against Ursula...above all when Ursula loves passionately?

And I...I shall only have renounced my love, to see that hateful woman take possession of Rochegune's heart. The late events had occurred with such rapidity, that till now the interview between Ursula and M. de Rochegune had not for a moment occurred to me.

Had I thought of it, perhaps I should have been cruel enough to sacrifice Emma, rather than run the risk of seeing Ursula loved by M. de Rohegune.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

My resolution once taken, I wrote to M. de Lancry to say, that after having reflected on the desire that he had expressed, I willingly consented to return and live with him, I feared lest he should have recourse to legal interference, and so compromise all my efforts to make it appear that it was my own will and pleasure to return to him.

After M. de Rohegune's departure, I went to see Madam de Richeville and Emma.

The latter was much better, and the doctor now looked upon her recovery as certain. The Duchess, quite herself again; thanked me with the most tender effusion, for the care I had taken of her child.

When I abruptly announced to Madame de Richeville my intention of returning to live with M. de Lancry, attributing my resolution to do so, to the pity his misfortunes and repentance inspired me with; the Duchess thought I had lost my senses, and employed all her powers of persuasion to induce me to renounce that idea; the Prince D'Hericourt and wife joined their endeavours to hers to make me see the absurdity of such conduct; I asked them if I should lose their esteem, by taking such a step, they answered, no! for it was a praiseworthy exaggeration of duty which led me to it, but that it would be a very bad example, and that it was sad to see vice and corruption rewarded by such an act of devotion.

In vain I dwelt on the repentance and unhappiness, evinced by my husband, they answered me, that his unhappiness was well merited, and that his repentance had not been proved, many years of the most irreproachable conduct could hardly deserve the proof of blind attachment that I was on the point of shewing him. Better than any one, I could feel the justice of these remarks, but the interests of too many were at stake to allow me to hesitate a moment in the path that I had traced out for myself.

Nevertheless I perceived with regret that the Prince and Princess were in some degree alienated from me, I lost much ground in their esteem, they thought me weak, and wanting in self-respect, they were mortified to see me renounce the intimate connection with them, which had been a source of so much consolation to me, to return to the society of a man whom they despised, in short, they

seemed to regret having felt such sympathy for me in my former misfortunes, if I could so soon, and so easily forget them myself.

In vain the Duchess implored me to remain near her, in my pavillion, conquering for my sake, her repugnance to such a neighbour as M. de Lancry : I refused : my proceedings with my husband would be too much known, and the untruth I had told, would soon be discovered- I cannot describe the tears, the despair, of Madame de Richeville, in the sincerity of her friendship, and the violence of her grief, she made me many cruel reproaches, I heard them in silence, they were to me, proofs of her affection, and in her eyes, I deserved them; for the first time in my life I felt that kind of bitter enjoyment which results from the knowledge that you are misunderstood and blamed, when by speaking a single word all that blame would be changed to admiration.

Standing alone in the perplexing position in which I found myself, I felt that I must endeavour to pave the way as rapidly as possible to M. de Rochegune's marriage with Emma, before Ursula could have time to exercise her intrigues and seductions towards him.

My ardent desire to arrive at the conclusion of my undertaking and the exaltation that the conviction of performing a generous action brings with it, sustained my energies, and prevented my feeling crushed under the weight of my sacrifice.

Oh ! then it was that I recognised more strongly than ever the immense difference that existed between my love for M. de Rochegune and that which I had formerly felt for M. de Lancry. Before, I was cast down, overwhelmed, I could only suffer... I could not act; at present on the contrary tho' I suffered more, my sufferings were not useless, this time my tears were fruitful, even in the depth of my distress I felt that I was worthy of the man whom I adored.

Oh how proud I was of that love, of that pearl of my heart, preserved without a stain. If I sometimes felt my resolution falter I thought of those words God had suggested by Emma's bedside... "*Ah ! if he knew !*"

Yes ! I repeated to myself, if to-morrow I was to reveal all to M. de Rochegune would he not be at my feet more passionately in love than ever !

Nevertheless as I still loved him, even more than ever, I experienced sometimes, moments of cruel despondency and frightful despair, and at such times I found in my tears a sad enjoyment.

And after all, said I if I succeed in my projects, when Emma's happiness is well established, for surely M. de Rochegune cannot remain insensible to a love so true and ingenuous, and he will end, by returning it; what is to prevent my procuring a legal separation from my husband, and returning to live near Madame de Riche-

ville: perhaps even I may explain everything to M. de Rochegune, when he is once Emma's husband, then feeling certain, of himself and me, I may without fear unveil that mystery, prove to him that I never ceased to be worthy of him...that he owes to me all the happiness he enjoys with Emma, what a reward for all the grief I have suffered in silence ! how happy then my life will glide on in the society of those I love so much.

\* \* \* \* \*

I expected M. de Lancry on Sunday morning; before my departure I went to see Emma for the last time ; she was alone; during our short interview I renewed all the advice I had previously given her, with regard to keeping her secret both from Madame de Rich-ville, and M. de Rochegune. I promised to write to her by Blondeau, and made her promise to answer me by the same means. When she heard of my return to my husband the poor child could not conceal a start of involuntary joy, notwithstanding her sincere attachment for me, I did not blame her heart for it, it was only an instinct of her love.

I promised to come and see her often, feeling quite determined to keep a promise so necessary to the developement of my designs. Sunday morning, M. de Lancry made his appearance, at my house, according to his word. I had forgotten to mention, that since Ursula had deserted him, my husband, absorbed by his grief, had ceased to take the slightest care of his appearance, his features bore the marks of sorrow, and of all kinds of excess in which he had endeavoured to drown it, his eyes red, his figure bent, his beard long, his hair neglected, his dress dirty and shabby to the last degree, every thing about him seemed the very type and personification of vice and misery.

And this is the man, whom a few years since I had seen in all the *éclat* of youth, beauty, and success.

He said to me as he entered.

"I beg to compliment you, madam, upon the good will you have shewn, though I cannot help suspecting that your sudden submission is put on to hide some under-plot, but it is of no consequence, you need not hope to play any tricks upon me, I shall prove too deep for you."

"When shall we set off, sir?"

"This very instant madam, but have you no tender adieus to make to your intimate friend," said he, ironically, "have you not a few tears to shed? let me be no *gêne* upon you. I have five minutes at your service for those touching scenes."

"I have taken leave of Madame de Richeville this morning sir, tho' I hope to see her soon again.

"Oh as for that, you may see whoever you please you will not want for liberty—unless indeed—unless a little time hence—I think differently."

"Sir! when you like to go, I am ready to follow you."

"In a moment! I must just first announce to you, my dear friend! that the apartments I inhabit are by no means splendid; they are a very simple kind of *pied a terre* that I have taken since I gave up my house—for reasons that without doubt you can guess—I have had no time yet to make any improvements in them; and I must warn you that you will not be so well off in them, as you are here."

"I shall be content sir, with what has sufficed for you...if I have only a room to myself, and one close to it for Blondeau...I can have any furniture from here, that I may want."

"And I shall sell the remainder, for I must confess to you madam, that I am most singularly hampered...that surprises you! nevertheless it is so. You must be made acquainted with all my troubles, I shall hide nothing from you...well then, you must know that...to drown care I have taken to gaming. .that I have played a great deal, and lost a great deal...without doubt you have some savings?"

"I think sir we may defer for the present talking of money affairs."

"You are quite right madam...so permit me to offer you my arm."

We went out.

I got into the hackney coach with M. de Lanory, Blondeau followed me in another, with some few things that were indispensably necessary to me; I ordered my footman to come in the evening and bring some more things I should want.

As soon as we were in the carriage M. de Lanory said:

"I have kept a servant...it is a great luxury to have one, but the boy is attached to me, and he will be sufficient for us, with your Madame Blondeau. As I shall never dine at home, you can get your dinners from a neighbouring *restorateur*."

"Six years ago, sir, at about the same time of the year, as we were coming from Chantilly you drew a picture of what kind of establishment we should keep...times have changed since then."

"Very much, madam, which proves the truth of that saying: 'The days follow each other, but do not resemble each other.'...Oh ho! so you seem to be quite in a vein for epigrams. The *Maras* blood is shewing itself...well as you please...I am always agreeable...not *always* though...but here we are arrived."

We stopped at an old house in the Rue de Bourgogne. We crossed a dark, damp, miserable looking court, and mounted up to the second story, where a door was opened to us by the *valet-de-*

*chambre* of M. de Lancry. He was the one who had accompanied me that fatal night to the solitary house.

The appearance of that man was sinister ; there was a small anti-room, filled with trunks, and in the greatest disorder, a sitting room with hardly any furniture, to the right my husband's room, to the left mine, with a closet for Blondeau; such were the apartments I was to share with M. de Lancry. The papers were dirty, there were no curtains to the windows, the rooms were full of smoke, and the light could hardly make its way through the panes of glass encrusted with dust.

My heart smote me painfully, and I felt afraid.

The rooms appeared to me so isolated, so deserted, I looked around me uneasily...my poor Blondeau pressed close to me, and trembled.

" You think this lodging, rather mean," said M. de Lancry ironically...but the time for *Hotels* is past, my dear, we have eaten our white bread at the beginning."

" I shall accommodate myself to everything, sir, but I must make some indispensable repairs here."

" As you please...I shall not have to reproach you as I did at Maran, with the insupportable noise of the work men, for I go out very early, and return home very late...sometimes even I do not come home at all...so that you can do what you like here."

" In that case, sir, I shall ask leave to retain my footman, he can sleep in that little anti-room...he is a man in whom I can place confidence. This house is strange to me, and I am a great coward."

" If you have where withal to pay him, you can keep him, Fritz can sleep up stairs."

Blondeau went out of the room.

" Now madam, I must announce to you, with the frankness that ought always to exist between married people, that there remains only for all our expenses a *thousand écus*...you have your diamonds and other jewels ; you must have recourse to them...until this last year I have paid you a pension of twenty thousand francs—you cannot have spent all this—for at Maran you lived the life of a hermit——"

" But sir," said I, thunderstruck, " it is impossible that you can be reduced to such extremities."

" When Ursula disappeared there remained of our fortune, about two hundred and fifty thousand francs; as much from despair, as from the wish to distract my thoughts, I took to play—I played; and as I have already told you, with bad luck, for I lost the whole of it. Now that you fully understand this, let it no more be mentioned, I am never fond of looking back and——"

" What sir !" cried I, interrupting him, " It was then to make

me share in this horrible existence that you forced me to return to you? of what use can I be to you? you say you are never at home, what can be your motive," cried I, frightened, and almost regretting to have thus voluntarily put myself in M. de Lancry's power. But these regrets came too late, I must submit now to the consequences of my own proceedings and remain for some time with this man, or renounce all the plans dependent on my doing so, I could no longer complain to any one, neither ask assistance, or advice.

To all outward appearances I had acted freely and willingly, in returning to M. de Lancry.

My husband hastened to answer my questions.

"You ask me my dear, what could be my motive in recalling you, why first, the desire of enjoying your delightful company, and secondly—but that need not be told you."

"You have then, sir, some very odious projects since you hesitate to confess them."

"I am not going to talk of my projects: I have a right to keep you with me, and I shall keep you, as to any plans you may have formed for escaping from my custody, either now, or later, under the plea of a separation, I shall shew you, as an agreeable kind of distraction for you, a consultation on that subject, of which *this*, is the copy, which you may take, and study, it is drawn up by one of the first lawyers in Paris, and has cost me fifty louis, may it please you—it certainly was a piece of extravagance for a man in my position but I can hardly pay too dear for the precious assurance that we shall pass the remainder of our lives together."

And he gave me the paper.

"You will see that on the question of whether you have the slightest chance of obtaining an act of separation from me, three lawyers have decidedly said: '*No*!' the public voice attributes reciprocal faults to us—but besides that, your *voluntarily* returning to the *conjugal domicile*, being formally proved, is considered as an act of general amnesty, and acquittal to me, however great my faults towards you may have been. I was, I assure you, far from expecting such a good work from you, I was contenting myself with the first opinion of the three lawyers, so judge of my astonishment and joy when by your charming little note in which you said upon mature reflection you could see no reason for living any longer separated from me, I found you play so delightfully into my hands."

I could not restrain a gesture of despair when I thought of that fatal act of imprudence! it did not escape M. de Lancry.

"You did not think of all that—I see that you regret now, having sent that little square of satin and perfumed paper," said he, with cruel irony shewing me my letter, "which rivets your

chains—those chains which I much fear will not prove to be made of flowers—and so upon that—I shall go and dress, for to-day, as a wonder, I intend to make myself very fine.”

And M. de Lancry left me, stupified and overwhelmed.

I thought I was only providing for the *present*; and I discovered that I had irrevocably entangled myself for the *future*.

Thus I saw for ever destroyed my plan of returning to live near Madame de Richeville, and reaping at last the reward of my sacrifices by letting M. de Rochegune know the motives of my conduct.

That moment was a frightful one!

What M. de Lancry had told me, was too true; that fatal note remained an incontestable proof against me. How could I make any endeavours to obtain a divorce, when my husband held in his hands a written proof of my free and voluntary submission to his wishes.

Alas! it was thus, I felt the iron chains which bound me, draw closer and closer around me. A last blow remained for me still, it proved to me that my fears regarding Ursula were not without foundation.

In the evening—when with my poor Blondeau I was preparing, not without fear, to pass the first night, in my dismal apartment, a letter was brought to me; thus it ran:

“MADAM!

“One of your best friends, who for sometime past has made it his pleasure to put you in possession of your husband’s most secret thoughts, wishes to be the first to apprise you that it is Ursula who has ordered M. de Lancry to recall you to live with him, in order to break off your intimacy with M. de Rochegune—whom she is passionately in love with.

“Ursula has not seen your husband; but she wrote to him that the only means which would induce her to grant him an interview would be to take you back, and keep you with him; let it be well understood that the promises of Ursula are false, and that poor de Lancry does not know that he is aiding Ursula’s passion for Rochegune, by separating you from him.

“Ursula has had in her possession the original copy of a consultation signed by three famous lawyers, and the copy of a letter from you, in which you announce your willingness to return and live with M. de Lancry.

“This piece of information added to the hint the doctor has given you, renders this case rather complicated: the results must be as follows:

“1. That Emma will die of grief—which will be rather disagree-

able to Madame de Richeville, and to you, who will thus uselessly have sacrificed yourself.

"2. That Rochegune will fall a prey to the seductions of your friend Ursula, which will be no matter of indifference to you.

"3. That you will not be able to quit your husband, even when he finds out that Ursula has deceived him, there will then be other motives to keep you—which certainly would be enough to frighten you, if you could but look into futurity."

I could not doubt that letter, coming from M. Lugarto.

Such were the obstacles I had to overcome—such the dangers I had to encounter.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE CORRESPONDENCE.

WHEN I became more calm, and reflected quietly on my position, I felt less despair: I was rather re-assured by knowing the motive, which had induced M. de Lancry to insist on my return to him.

I thought I should be guilty of injustice to the character of M. de Rochegune, in supposing him capable of forming even the most transitory connection with Ursula; that woman had caused me so much grief, that I knew he felt for her both aversion and hatred.

A difficulty almost insurmountable appeared to be, to bring about the marriage with Emma, and above all, not to let M. de Rochegune suspect that I knew of that poor child's love.

I could have formed no idea of the miserable existence to which M. de Lancry's difficulties condemned me, I appreciated more than the *prévoyance* of M. de Mortagne; my estate at Maran had been purchased under the name of Madame de Richeville; that property was sufficient to keep me far above want.

But in consequence of my strange position, I was obliged for the present, to live in the same manner, as my husband did; as it was not to appear, that I possessed anything of my own. I do not exaggerate when I say that I resigned myself to that manner of living, which certainly approached to poverty, with much indifference; I bore it as a trial of my fortitude.

Thanks to the exertions of Blondeau, my desolate apartment was made habitable, I hardly ever saw M. de Lancry; when I did, by his alternate fits of coarse gaiety, or gloomy sadness, I guessed that Ursula had encouraged, or disappointed his hopes, I trusted the

time would come, when, if she no longer ordered him to keep me with him, he would consent to a separation.

My forced return to my husband did not therefore much augment my affliction, which was all caused by the loss of M. de Rohegune's affections, and by fears for the future on account of Emma.

The next morning Madame de Richeville came to see me, having taken care to assure herself of M. de Lancry's absence. She burst into tears when she saw the poverty of my abode, that poverty—she said, explained to her my devotion; Emma was rapidly recovering, and her mother felt no doubt of the perfect re-establishment of her health.

I enquired of Madame de Richeville if she had heard any news of M. de Rohegune, she had not, knowing how grieved he would be at the step I had taken, she sent to enquire for him; his answer was, he was rather unwell.

Madame de Richeville told me that my conduct was variously commented on, and judged in the world; some blamed me, others praised me beyond measure; I confess that under my present circumstances, I felt that I had *that* within me which was sufficient to counterbalance all the judgments of the world.

The following morning I received this letter from M. de Rohegune:

“Paris,

“I have been unjust, brutal and cruel, towards you! my vanity was wounded. Pride is always the foundation of all our bad feelings: you felt for another, what you could not feel for me; and my self-love revolted from such a conviction; my good sense became obscured: I did not see in your husband a man worthy or unworthy of your love. I saw in him, only a rival.

“This is plain logic, I have descended from the sphere of our elevated sentiments; and have fallen into the pit of jealousy, was it possible that we could dream of being able to remain in such a position. Oh, no! Platonic love is an impossibility between two young persons, sooner or later one or the other will fall. It is a dangerous doctrine, though it appears full of charms and grandeur. If your unconquered love for your husband had not been the prop of your virtue, you would have fallen as I have! but when the heart is pre-engaged, it is not free to receive another passion.

“I have reflected a great deal, I have put myself in your position, in order to be able to judge your conduct impartially: You are *irreproachable*! as for me I have not even the sad consolation of having the right to complain.

“The Future, to which I had looked forward, was a magnificent one! to devote my life to you, to hide our happiness in solitude

" (for great passions always seek retirement), and now, what remains to me? Nothing, neither the love of a brother or of a lover!

" By evincing a sudden preference for another! You proved your indifference to me—the woman I loved therefore exists for me no longer—to attempt to conquer or combat against *repugnance* shewn towards me, would be as impossible, to my disposition, as it is, to forget that I was the object of it.

" There are certain impressions which can never be effaced; it would be as impossible now, for me to attempt to look upon you in the light of a sister, as it would be, for me to retrograde to the age of twenty, our position is entirely overthrown! broken up for ever! I am now thirty; and ever since I was eighteen I had loved you, and I had proved it to you. If my affection is at last destroyed, at least the remembrance of it, will remain with me for ever.

" We should religiously honour the memory of those who no longer exist.

" Yes! the feeling that I entertain for you, at this moment is the kind of sacred and melancholy feeling that we cherish for those, whom we survive!

" My regrets will be eternal—eternal—if they were to be consumed, the very ashes would rise up in remembrance—so immutable were my feelings towards you.

" I do not reproach you Matilda! we do not vent reproaches on those we lose—we only weep for them.

" These are dismal comparisons; but I make use of them in order to prove to you that the past has become to me like a *sepulchre*; my love is *dead*—it is not sleeping—it has been *killed*!

\* \* \* \* \*

" Yesterday I experienced such a fit of rage and hatred...that I was almost mad...I wished to challenge your husband and kill him! I say kill him! because I felt a certain *présentiment* that such would be the case, the conviction frightened me, I shrunk from being an assassin!

" It is a proof how completely you have detached me from you, and that I shall never be able to forget your preference of such a miserable and degraded being, that when I thought of killing your husband I remembered perfectly well that even if you became a widow, I should have placed an insurmountable barrier between us!

" That thought would not have deterred me for a second...were you free to-morrow, I should reject the remainder of a life...which

"you had *twice* devoted to such a man...after that, oh never !...  
"never !..."

The latter part of this letter of M. de Rochegune's was the most painful to me, it proved to me, how deep and festering was the wound I had inflicted.

Such strong resentment, however, was calculated to pave the way for my projects with regard to Emma, I could at least no longer be considered in the light of an obstacle to them.

I had still some vague fears with regard to Ursula ; but yet how could I imagine that M. de Rochegune would ever consent to listen to her ; would he not treat all her advances with the utmost contempt ? I was absorbed in these reflections when I received the following letter from M. Lugarto, or one of his emissaries for I did not recognise the hand-writing.

Judge of the terror that it caused me.

" Paris,

" The unknown friend to whom you are already indebted for so much intelligence, (precious and agreeable as it must be to you), relative to the proceedings of your husband, continues his task with a fresh accession of pleasure ; since the events he has to relate, become more and more interesting ; first you will learn Ursula's proceedings, as in that phantasmagoria the figure of M. de Rochegune often makes its appearance, and there is reason to believe, *that* is particularly pleasing to you ; here is an account of Ursula ; ever since her disappearance from the Hotel de Maran, the only thing which is concealed from you, is the precise place of Ursula's abode, because there is no occasion you should know that, suffice it to say that she inhabits one of the most isolated and retired of spots in the faubourgs of Paris.

" For the last two years Ursula has had a *femme-de-chambre* devotedly attached to her, and in whom she places the most unlimited confidence. Mademoiselle Zéphyrine (that is her name) was commissioned by her mistress to find out and hire a solitary house in some very retired situation.

" Mademoiselle Zéphyrine, a girl full of zeal and intelligence, and *above all of fidelity*, found out in a deserted street in the Faubourg of Paris a perfect *trappist's cell*. The day after the masked ball, your handsome rival, abandoning all her luxuries at the Hotel de Maran, set off in a hackney coach with Mademoiselle Zéphyrine, and reached in safety her unknown retreat, where she remained hid up for a fortnight ; during which fortnight M. de Lanery searched all over Paris and its environs without being able to learn any news of his fugitive.

" Now you are going to have submitted to your view, a few frag-

"ments containing the secret thoughts of Ursula written by herself in an Album, the key of which she always keeps.

"You will guess, perhaps, and you will not be far mistaken, that you owe the sight of them, to the indiscretion of Mademoiselle Zephyrine who, during the time, that her mistress walks out, has found the means of opening this Album, and copying therefrom, in order to transmit her copy to her *invisible master*, who has great pleasure in imparting the contents to you.

"The beginning of Ursula's Journal dates as far back as two years, the last words of it, were written a very few days since. There can be no doubt the perusal of these reflections, will cause you many emotions, equally *soothing and salutary*!

*Ursula's Journal.*

"I experienced this evening a moment of triumph, I saw Matilda at the opera; her husband came and joined me; I received him badly, and she must have seen it. Revenge induced me to take her husband from her, and to have an opportunity of humiliating him before her, was a pleasure; Monsieur de Senneville is supposed to be irresistible, to me he appears ridiculous; tying his neckcloth must be with him, a matter of solemnity, and putting on his gloves, a source of much meditation. His conversation is as monotonous as it is unbearable; for he always sings to the same tune. His greatest fault in my eyes is that he is pretty; Mere beauty is not what I admire in a man—for that reason M. de Laucry never pleased me. His is one of those faces without expression that nature sometimes casts disdainfully in her mould. Pretty No. 1. not worth an original mould—Lord C. is better—more decided; but he is *too English*, like most of his countrymen! he is embarrassed in his arrogance, and awkward with his pride; but all these sort of people are morally and physically alike—they are so obtuse—they seem to feel through their flannels.

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"Where then shall I find a man, rough, imperious, full of passion, who will make me bend under his strong hand like a reed? How I despise this Gontran. His attentions are low servility, his devotion the cringing service of a slave. He loves me like a servant afraid of being sent away. What can you expect from a wretch who robs his wife; for in fact it is robbing her, and most basely too, when he ruins himself for me. And her—how I hate her! She does not look unhappy. Why should she, when I, fool, that I am, have relieved her from her husband?

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"Mademoiselle de Maran mentioned to me to-day a saying of the late Duchess of F——, which I thought good. They were talking of Mademoiselle de P——, who before the revolution had been upon more than friendly terms with the Prince of \* \* \*

"The Duchess of F——, observed:—'You may compromise yourself with a *soldier*, disgrace yourself with an *Abbé*, and make yourself ridiculous with a *lawyer*, and there's an end of it; but no woman who respects herself, will have anything to do with a *Prince of the Blood*, or a *financier*.' There are certain passions, that it is very flattering to excite; but it is more flattering still to disdain.

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"Mons. de Bolganges (one of my new admirers) took it into his head to reproach me for what he calls my coquetry, complaining bitterly that for two months—I have received him favourably—Is there anything in the world so absurd as these recriminations? Here is a man, who complains that for some weeks I have received him with favour, with attention, and even in preference to others. Was that not treating him a thousand times better than he deserved? In exclaiming against our want of constancy, in talking of what they so ridiculously call *their rights*, are not the men who have made love to us, as absurdly unreasonable, as those thieves, who consider themselves really robbed, when, after a prodigious effort they have broken open—an empty box.

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"Both in theory and practice I have always considered men, as our implacable enemies. There is hate, even in their most passionate love; or rather as soon as there is passion, there is hate—*Matilda's husband* adores me, but he execrates me. He submits to my yoke, but in doing so, trembles with rage. He loves me, because he can't help it—I torture him without pity, because I know the secret of my power over him, and that secret is a disgraceful one, and though my enmity to Matilda is great, I feel nevertheless a certain satisfaction, in thinking that I have no pity for the man, who has made her so miserable.

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"If we decline their homage, men detest us; if we listen to it, they despise us...they never forgive, either our virtue or our defeat. When they are occupied about us they bring into play a whole string of odious qualifications...vanity, falsehood, jealousy...and then comes distrust, and hypocrisy, and above all the hateful dread of

not succeeding...on their side, there is no love; it is more whim, or caprice; but above all the pride of ruining a true heart, or of triumphing over their rivals. There is probably not a man who would not rather prefer to be *thought* on good terms with the greatest beauty of the season, than to be so, in reality, if it were unknown by the world. They are much more satisfied with the apparent sacrifice of our reputations, than the unknown one of our principles. How few men would risk for a woman, what every woman risks, who commits a fault? it reminds me of what I read in a new work the other day:

"If a guilty *liaison* could be easily discovered, and punished with a fine, which should amount to a quarter of the fortune of the lover, where is the man who would expose himself to the danger of being loved at such a price."

"I harden my heart therefore by thinking that we only do to the men, the evil, they wish to do to us."

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"The looks of that actor struck me very much...I felt his bursts of passion...he was resolute, violent, and impassioned...he played his part with a fierce and savage energy. When he grasped hold of that woman, when he threw her on the ground with his powerful hand, he was superb. His brow was menacing, his jealousy inexorable. And then his manly voice, a little hoarse, with a deep vibration, almost like a lion. That stupid *Princesse de Ksernika* was with me; she giggled, and exclaimed: 'that he almost roared,' I suppose she would like the lion to coo like the dove."

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In the love scene, this actor for a moment had an admirable expression; he did not stupidly steal the kiss from the *young girl*, but he took it boldly, with a fierceness almost brutal.

In coming out, as I was praising Stephen, (that is the name of the actor) while the *Princesse Ksernika* attacked him, as she, poor woman, does attack people, M. de Lancry took it into his head to observe to me, very respectfully it is true, that I defended Stephen rather too warmly...I gave him one of my *black looks*...he understood it, but it was too late. Leaning coquettishly upon his arm with one of my sweetest smiles I said to him in a very low voice, that I would write to Stephen, to-morrow morning to ask him to give me lessons in the art of elocution, as I had suddenly taken a fancy to learn to act, (I mean to do no such thing, be it well under-

hood) *Matilda's husband* staggered, at this cruel confidence and allowed himself to remark in his painful astonishment, that this new caprice of mine was, to say the least of it, a very odd one, I redoubled the sweetness of my smile, and gave him notice that he must go, the day after the following one, and hire for me, a box to see Stephen act in the same play ; and that I insisted upon a small theatre being immediately fitted up in the garden of the Hotel Maran.

" These orders will, I have no doubt, be executed. This Gontran is foolish enough never to give me the amusement of a refusal, or of feeling that there is an impossibility. He is like my mare Stella, who is so insupportably well broken in, that her docility irritates me ; I beat her from anger—because she gives me no reason to beat her.

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" The Architect of M. de Lancry came to shew me various plans of Theatres—I did not find any of them rich enough—I want to have something resembling, upon a small scale, that of Versailles ; and above all, that can be built immediately. I thought it over in the night, and just now I told *Matilda's husband* that instead of hiring me a box to-morrow evening at Stephen's Theatre, he should hire it for six months, in order to have the right of furnishing it ; for this little Theatre on the Boulevards is horrible ; and I intend to go there now and then. The furniture, glasses and draperies will all be there to-morrow. Gontran has six-and-thirty hours before him ; for a man given to indulge one with magnificent surprises, this is more time than is necessary.

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" I am just returned from the embassy...the ball was admirable ; I felt myself in high beauty, nevertheless I was bored to death...how insipid and monotonous are all the attentions with which I am besieged ; and then...to feel that one has only to wish it, to be able to take all these devoted admirers from their wives and mistresses...the facility is disgusting. To give zest to a weakness, there is nothing like principles, or obstacles. Alas ! I am reduced to the last. But I am too much the fashion to meet with any, and the men too grossly and too easily false to their loves. Oh if I could but find a being insensible to my seductions, what glory to triumph over him.

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" That thought put me in a bad humour ; and my admirers per-

ceived it...I was nervous, irritable...I revenged myself upon a few men and women which amused Madlle. de Maran very much. Certainly she is very fond of me...our common dislike to Matilda proves a bond of union between us, and then I amuse her!...she grows old; and would be frightened at the solitude to which her ill-nature would reduce her...but I care not, if I abandon her some day...should my fate call me elsewhere.

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"*Matilda's husband* has surpassed himself...I found my box arranged as well as could be...all the lower end was filled up with an immense flower-stand; (a useful precaution at this theatre). But for what purpose...I shall never set my foot in this theatre again...my illusions are destroyed...at the second performance, Stephen, who at first had so struck my imagination, seemed detestable, ugly, vulgar. Where could have been my judgment, and my eyes...but I will not complain of my first impression, so different from the second, as it has given me the idea of having a *theatre*, and I am enchanted at the thought of acting.

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"I have just acted Celimene...this little theatre is charming. If I may believe our audience, I acquitted myself *à merveille*. It is very amusing...It appears that in one of Madlle. Dejaget's parts, I have turned all heads, by my extreme effrontery. How stupid and vain men are! When they are pleased at seeing a woman affect a forward impudence, they imagine that this assumption of *cynisme* is on *their* account, and to turn to their profit...they do not understand in their stupid pride, that the more we risk in their presence, the less we think of them. After this little piece *Matilda's husband* came to me with a radiant air, apparently imagining that my choice of the part had been a declaration of my principles for his particular benefit...I gave him such a reception, that he went away confused and ashamed.

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"The life that I lead is perfectly unbearable...sometimes a blank, at others a bore—nevertheless in the eyes of all, even in my own, there is not a more fortunate existence than mine...I have attained the height of luxury, and the reputation of elegance, that I so much coveted.. I am a woman of fashion, in the full acceptation of the term...I rule great part of the best society in Paris. All the men are at my feet...my rivals hate and fear me...I am sufficiently

superior to them, to be always very good-natured to them...I drive them to despair by despising the love they so much envy me, and defy their powers of conquest, to entice from me the fidelity of which I make a joke. Like a successful usurper, I have made myself what I am !...I have turned a name almost ridiculous, into a symbol of elegance and distinction...my dresses are copied, my jokes quoted...my successes are envied...my preference for a man, makes him the fashion, my quizzing ruins him for ever. When I arrive at a ball, all the women seize their lovers with a strong hand, and I see nothing but looks of hatred and jealousy. I hear nothing but angry whisperings, and reproaches. But if one of the flowers of my bouquet fall at my feet, all the lovers break their chains, and rush to pick it up...to the infinite mortification of a host of fine ladies, who endeavour in vain to recall the frightened offenders. All that is charming...nevertheless something is wanting, or rather I am wanting to myself. I am not in love. I have never loved. Oh how I wish I could love.

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" One day I thought I felt one of those deep but silent emotions which announce the storm of passion ; as the first roll of the thunder announces the tempest...but, alas, this hope too was vain...how ridiculously my smile is out of place—nevertheless a man such as my dreams have pictured, would have understood how I wished to be loved ; and that I would have sacrificed everything for him—I might have lived in misery, and in poverty ; he might have beaten me, betrayed me ; sent me away from him—but still I should have loved him—I should have had some moments of sublime passion—I should have raised myself in my own eyes.

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" Raised myself? does a secret instinct then tell me that grief purifies like fire? Was it then a restoration that I was seeking in love? No, no!—I have no remorse—I ought not to have any—I will not. Once only I felt for Matilda—I shewed myself as kind and generous as my nature permitted, towards her, and I was cruelly punished for it.

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" I must always hate M. de Lancry—sometimes in spite of myself I feel the flush of shame spreading over my brow, at the thought that his odious ingratitude towards his wife, is the cause of the splendid life I lead. In vain I try to compromise with my conscience,—in vain I say to myself there is nothing to signify in the pleasures

I enjoy—in vain have I treated the *husband of Matilda* as a wretch, ever since the day when he dared to offer me anything more than flowers and serenades. Oh, there are certain cups of which the drags are full of bitterness and gall.

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“ This time I am struck to the heart—oh yes, to the heart—I must write down the date ; from this day, happy or miserable, my life of love begins. At last I have found the man of my dreams. He did not see me ; he only passed by—I know neither his name, nor who he is—but if he is the highest or lowest of men, I feel that I shall love him : that I do love him, that I belong to him. What a noble and haughty look—what a step, firm and light at the same time—and that bronzed complexion—and those red lips, and those black eyebrows, and those large grey eyes. Ah ! when eyes like those condescend only to look down upon you, one ought to fall upon one’s knees, and exclaim—“ Master command, here is your slave,”—and this unknown, who can he be ?

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“ What is this invisible mysterious power which I obey ? This man has not said a word to me, his looks have never been directed towards me, and yet I feel myself subdued, conquered. My deep emotion tells me that my fate is accomplished.

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“ Nothing was ever less romantic than my meeting with this unknown—I was passing through the Tuilleries on foot. I saw before me a man walking slowly...his height, his figure had already seemed to me remarkable. He turned about, as if he had lost his way through absence...then, oh then...at his appearance I could not help stopping. He did not see me...he went away...he was gone while I was still looking after him.

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“ Who is this man ? Who is this man ? I have never seen him in the world. It don’t signify—I know that he exists—shall I ever see him again. Yes...yes, without that we should never have met... He exists ! that explains, that justifies my contempt for all other men ...yes, for all. For are not those who thought they had some claims upon me the very ones I have treated most outrageously and disdainfully ? Have they ever had, not power, but even the least

influence over my heart, my spirit, or my soul? Is not indifference in certain cases the very height of insult? *Matilda's husband* is a case in point...a man is not a slave.

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"Misery of miseries...he is the lover of Matilda—it is the Marquis de Rochegune.

"This singular and remarkable man, of whom all the world is talking, who has been only arrived a few days, and whom I was so curious to know—it is him—it is him—he loves Matilda—She loves him. Was I not right when I said I hated that woman—this then is the secret of the implacable hatred I have felt towards her from her infancy—Instinct told me that she would one day love the man, in whom my whole destiny was centred—She loves him—but she is *not worthy* of him; did she not love, and passionately love, that dull and miserable Gontran—How proud I am, never to have loved till now—and I was dissatisfied—but I ought upon my knees to thank the fates that have hitherto made me insensible.

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"I am horrified with myself, and all about me—now I have found out that I am an unfortunate degraded creature. A man like him will never lower himself to me—it is *now* I see the depth of the abyss of dishonour and infamy into which I have fallen—I can never wash out this stain. With what stupid paradoxes I had encouraged myself—to think myself worthy of him—me—what profanation—shall I ever dare to look at him, much more speak to him—speak to him—I should die of mortification. Ah! now I understand what modesty; or rather what shame is.

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"I can stay no longer in Mademoiselle de Maran's house—this luxury offends me—I should like to hide myself from everybody—to enjoy all this magnificence, I have sold myself—the unfortunate creatures that want leads to ruin, are angels compared to me—I hate the light of day—I feel as if my shame was less in the dark—how he must love her—how she must love him! What pride... what courage—what a halo of honour, patriotism and loyalty surround the noble name of this man—I am overwhelmed at the thoughts of it—and Matilda too—how she is loved by everybody—how much her conduct is approved of—and admired—how magnificent is the meeting of these two bright spirits—how pure and grand

is their love—And Gontran—this Gontran who sneers at them, the wretch !—Can he understand them ? No—thank God.

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“ I am mad. I went in a hackney coach, and passed two hours in front of his house, in the hopes of seeing him come out...only to see him, for nothing should make me expose myself to his sight in public—I should die of fright and shame ; I should not be able to falter out a word. For the last month I have shunned all society ; I scarcely ever go down to Mademoiselle de Maran ; though there I am sure to find no one. I have waited a long time at his door... he came out on foot. I followed him in the carriage in which I was concealed. He went to Matilda's ; he staid there until six o'clock. Oh ! how happy she is ! I have not the heart to hate her, or envy her ; I can only suffer. In spite of myself, I am obliged to allow they are worthy of each other.

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“ Weep...weep, unhappy creature ! weep tears of blood and of rage. Go—die of despair...anything rather than he should know of your mad love ; for you ! there would be no return but mockery and insult.

“ And yet, if I had met this man sooner, my life would have been quite different...it would have been as pure and honourable as it has now been disgraceful and disorderly ; but at least it will not last much longer. He will never know me...he will never know how much I have loved him ; but the flame that he has kindled in me, will have purified my life. To day I have made all my arrangements preparatory to quitting the Hotel de Maran. I go to poverty...I must work, or I must die ; but I shall be free, and worthy of having him in my thoughts—of having him in my thoughts. Oh ! that alone is sufficient to excite me to good works.

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“ All my energies are roused ; to-morrow I shall abandon this house ; but to-night...I shall speak to him ; yes ! I shall have that courage...an idea strikes me—it is the night of the masked ball at the Opera. I will make an appointment with him. My letter shall be couched in such terms, that he will believe it is some poor unhappy person ashamed of avowing herself. I am sure he will come ! shall I ever have courage to speak to him, I know not ! At the very idea my weakness, my doubts return ; ah ! I am very

cowardly ; I fear—I tremble. With what emotion I read the few lines that I have written to him !

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“ I have spoken to him ! oh, heavens ! I have spoken to him ! He felt the beating of my heart as I leant my arm on his ; my lips have timidly kissed his hand—his noble hand ; my tears moistened it. He was right to answer me with gentleness ; never could any favour from the highest sovereign have excited more passionate gratitude ; my mask gave me courage ; had it not been for that I could not have spoken a word. He took pleasure in listening to what I said, for I praised Matilda. It seemed to scorch my lips, but I became more and more eloquent in my praise of her. I saw him smile with contempt and aversion when I mentioned my name. To please him still more, I dwelt on the infamy of my conduct ; I could hardly find words bitter enough to accuse myself. Oh ! what despair I felt, as I measured the impassable distance that my past life puts between me and that sublime man !

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“ I have quitted the Hotel de Maran—I shall never see M. de Lancry again—I have escaped at last from that atmosphere of shame and degradation which suffocated me—I would not now exchange my poor little abode for all the palaces in the world.

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“ M. de Rochegune will never see me again—I shall never again hear his voice—he will never know that he has spoken with gentleness and kindness to the woman he the most detests in the world.

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“ I am frightened at the ravages this passion causes in me—my head becomes wild, and the most horrible ideas suggest themselves to my mind—oh if he knew of my love surely he would have pity on me—yes I am sure he would love me, he would prefer me to Matilda—after all, what influence has he exercised over her ? none whatever !—she was good and pure—I was depraved—I was lost—and simply from the sight of him, and because he addressed a few gentle words to me, my love for him has made me as pure and as good as Matilda—and who knows ? whether *she* may not have fallen, oh if she has, how much prouder should I be of his influence over me—Matilda was a virtuous woman, he will have made her a guilty

one ! I was lost and abandoned, and he has restored me to virtue ! is not that a conquest much more worthy of his great soul. He who loves so much, everything that is good and noble, could he remain insensible to the transformation he has achieved.

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" Yes ! it is true he has transformed me, he has made me feel such remorse, as I never felt before—my conduct towards my husband appears to me in all its atrocity—my heart smites me when I think of that generous and devoted being, who loved me with such idolatry, and whom I deserted for a man that I despised.

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" A short time since I should not have hesitated a moment in executing the resolution I have formed—but now—for two days past I have struggled and endeavoured to fight against it—but the interests of my love carry the day ; that love is now my life —It is not egotism—it is not cruelty it is the instinct of self-preservation—I know of a sure means of separating M. de Rochegune from Matilda : I shall write to Gontran, without telling him where I am, and I shall promise to see him again if he can prevail on Matilda to return and live with him !—I know that in doing that, I run the risk of pushing their passion to an extremity, by forcing them to fly perhaps, in order to escape from M. de Lancry ; but I cannot be more unhappy than I am—I have nothing to lose, and I may gain everything.

Gontran will not dare to refuse me, of that I am certain ; but Matilda once in the power of M. de Lancry, what shall I do then ? —shall I dare to meet the looks of one, the thought, of whom alone, is sufficient to overwhelm me ? Does he not passionately love Matilda ?—if he could have the least idea that it was I who caused her to return her husband, what horror, what hatred I should inspire him with ! Well ! at least he cannot hate me more than he does at present !—so *n'importe* !—I risk my last, my only hope !

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" What wonders ! do I dream !—it is scarcely four days since I wrote to M. de Lancry, and I have received a letter from him sent to the address that Zephyrine gave him, assuring me that Matilda is coming to live with him, and enclosing a note from her, in which she freely and willingly consents to his proposal !—once more—am I dreaming ? I have sent Zéphyrine who is ac-

quainted with some of M. de Rochegune's servants to learn some tidings of him.

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"Zéphyrine is just come back—I tremble—I am frightened!—some strokes of happiness are so overwhelming, that one cannot believe them, they appear impossible—for four days M. de Rochegune absorbed in violent grief has not gone near Matilda!—She has become madly in love with her husband—this is the general report—Can that be possible? No! I cannot believe it—if it so—if it be so ah! I may hope everything!"

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE APPOINTMENT.

AFTER reading this journal which initiated me into the most secret thoughts of Ursula I remained a few moments overcome, and unable to continue M. Lugarto's letter, I was struck with the sincerity and the violence of my cousin's passion for M. de Rochegune! With my usual habit of exaggerating all my fears, I felt cruelly many of Ursula's observations. What she said about the salutary influence of M. de Rochegune upon her, appeared to me but too true: perhaps he might feel an interest in perceiving the wonderful change he had wrought in her.

And then however odiously paradoxical the comparison that Ursula made, when she said I had loved M. de Lancry while *she had never loved him*: indeed, that she had *never loved* any one, till she knew M. de Rochegune, I yet thought there was some truth in that reasoning.

My anxieties redoubled when I thought of the feelings of scepticism and distrust, that my conduct must have inspired in M. de Rochegune.

After such a blow, in the midst of the bitter and painful thoughts which would assail him, would he not be more accessible to the seductions of Ursula! might he not exercise a kind of revenge towards me, for rendering him so unhappy, by forming a connection with her.

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Wishing to know all I could of my fate, I continued reading M. Lugarto's letter, which went on thus:

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M M

" These are all the fragments of Ursula's Journal which your *unknown friend* thinks proper to lay before you at present : all that Ursula has added since your voluntary return to your husband consists in reflections and thoughts, more or less fervent on the subject of her love.

" It appears she is now occupied in endeavouring to arrange an appointment with M. de Rochegune.

" As she loves with real passion, which you must have remarked, and as there is always an irresistible charm in a true attachment, as Rochegune is furious against you in particular, and against all virtuous women, in general, your dear cousin, who is no fool, feels that her hour is come, and that it is an excellent time to offer her consolations—therefore she exclaims, '*I may hope every thing !*'

" Men are such strange beings, that there is little doubt Rochegune will allow himself to be caught in your cousin's net. Ha ! ha ! you see how comically it all turns out—all the heroic sacrifices that the communication of Doctor Gerard imposed upon you, will only tend to aid Madame Ursula in her plans.

" Apropos of that revelation of Emma's love, a love, which as is usual in all such cases, had escaped the suspicions of Madame de Richeville, M. de Rochegune, and yourself...apropos of that love I say, it had not escaped the observation of one of your friends ; he commented on it, in a vague manner, it became a ray of light : the consequences you are aware of.

" And now let me continue in my own name, for by this time you must have recognized me from the interest I take in you ! let me point out to you all the advantages of your position.

" I can do everything against you—you can do nothing against me—there is not a single loop-hole through which you can hope to make your escape.

" Now let us see ! If in despair at being thus understood, if fearing the influence that Ursula may obtain over M. de Rochegune you resolve to confess to him the reason of your sacrifice, 1st. Emma must die ! that is as clear as the day !—2ly. you cannot escape from your husband to rejoin your platonic friend, after Emma's death, as your letter *legally* prevents all hope of obtaining a separation !—as for attempting a secret flight, you are watched : your husband would be instantly made acquainted with it, and *he has had excellent reasons given him, never to abandon you.*

" What do you say to the inextricable web in which you have thrown yourself ? I am going to draw a comparison which I think you will see the justice of—

" It appears to me that at the very moment you are reading these lines you are extremely like a poor fly who has got entangled in the midst of a spider's web : all his efforts to escape only serve to

"entangle him still more—to crown his horror, he sees the hideous spider, fixing his eyes upon him, and enjoying the spectacle of his mortal agony before he pounces upon him to devour him——

At this passage of this most execrable letter, I could not restrain a cry of horror, so true did that comparison appear to me, and so completely did I feel myself surrounded by some invisible power.

I finished the letter fearing every moment that I should lose my senses, so much was I horrified, thus it concluded :

"Do you know, my dear Matilda, that I have made a shrewd guess ; that just at this portion of my letter you have experienced a sort of terror, similiar to what I used to feel in my childhood, when I read the romances of Anne Radcliffe ?—at any rate it is not at all impossible that *that* may be the case ; for I conclude you are reading it, all alone, in your melancholy and sombre apartment in the Rue de Bourgogne, which I was well acquainted with —mark you...before you came to inhabit it...in order to give you a proof of the truth of what I advance...look well at the wainscot to the left of your room...do you remark it ?——

I interrupted myself here, and mechanically looked at the wainscot.

Though I saw nothing to alarm me, yet I shuddered when I remembered the solitary house.

I continued reading with a frightful palpitation at my heart.

"Now, go near, and press with force upon the gilding of the wainscotting which touches the chimney-piece and you will discover something which will astonish you.

Almost beside myself with fright, I called Blondeau.

"Oh ! madam what has happened to you," cried she.

Without being able to answer her, I pointed to the panel in the wainscot with a look of terror.

"Once more, madam ! what is the matter with you ? you frighten me !"

Somewhat re-assured by her presence, I pressed the gilding of the wainscot, it gave way.

I uttered a piercing scream...Blondeau as much frightened as I was, did the same.

The wainscotting, opening by a spring, gradually gave way.

I saw a recess large enough to contain one person, a flue con-

ecting with the chimney, gave sufficient air for a person to breathe in it.

"Oh Heavens, madam! what is the meaning of that," cried Blondeau turning pale.

She shut the panel, and I continued reading the letter; doubting whether it was reality, or a dream.

"Well, you have now seen my hiding place, you must have had a pretty fright? truly this will help you to sleep quietly.

"You will imagine now, that this house (which belongs to me) is full of traps, as we read of in the Romances of Ducray-Duminil... the best part of the story is that if you appeal to your husband to allow you to change your lodgings, he will treat your request as folly.

"Ha! ha! I can fancy you will have some capital nights. What an agreeable repose will await you after your daily *chagrins*...I advise you to make your faithful Blondeau mount guard. Yes but then the *soporifics*...do you remember the *soporifics*?...why you will be afraid of touching anything provided by your modest restaurateur, who perhaps is a man in my pay (apropos what a fall for a woman who had one of the finest establishments in Paris!)

"Now confess that it is a desirable thing, to have the command of money...if I were Satan himself I could hardly possess more fully the means of tormenting you...you will be a prey to continual terrors, your sleep will be disturbed by the most frightful dreams, during the day your mind will be engrossed by the diabolical perplexities of your position. so that, in short...neither by day or night will you have a single moment of repose; to say nothing of the future, which is so obscured by clouds, so threatening, so black, and so tempestuous that you can but entertain the darkest apprehensions.

"Ha! ha! ha! at least this is not all *couleur de rose*! but on my conscience, it is a little your own fault: hatred, and a thirst for revenge quickens all ones faculties. Do you remember the night, when in your presence I was insulted, tortured, till I had to cry for mercy! on my knees?...you must have felt quite sure that I should not pass it over! and my vengeance has begun.

"But experience has made me wise, I chuse now to have my prey in my own hands; as for Mortagne! I was five hundred miles off, when the assassin picked a quarrel with him, and put him out of my way.

"Now I defy you to make any use of this letter...you will appeal to the laws! *I am not to be found in Paris*; and besides if I were, what could I be accused of—a few love affairs—and yet it is

"droll enough those said love affairs bring in their train, tears of despair ! murders ! and suicides !

"And now, after all this, I wish you a peaceful and good night—such sleep as the child enjoys nestled in its mother's bosom.

"Your unknown friend, or your  
"declared enemy, whichever you chuse  
"\_\_\_\_\_."

The perusal of that letter caused me the most painful kind of giddiness ; all my ideas seemed confused, and to crowd upon my brain without any connection.

M. Lugarto with infernal ability, had anticipated all my objections, awakened all my fears.

When I reflected that Ursula might succeed in pleasing M. de Rochegune, my despair knew no bounds, "if Emma must die," cried I, "how useless has been my sacrifice."

Once I was on the point of telling everything to M. de Rochegune : I was going to write to him when that divine voice which always seemed near to sustain my faltering resolution, said to me :

"Courage—courage—do not permit yourself to be cast down : turn your eyes from the abyss that a monster has created, in order to hurl you from your noble resolution.

"Do not look downwards, but raise your eyes to Heaven ; put your trust in God, he will not fail you.

"If the man whom you believed worthy of you, can listen to the seductions of Ursula. Is his heart worth regretting ? can you envy her ?

"If Emma must die, when she finds out that he prefers another, at least, it will not be *you*, who are the cause of that fatal event—but try rather to console her, if you do not succeed, if she sinks under it, do not forget her mother, who has acted the part of a mother towards you.

"As for the mysterious threats of that monster, do not let them frighten you ; chase away all vain terrors—be courageous—be firm...face boldly all your difficulties, and despise his threats of vengeance. Courage ! one step more...perhaps the reward of so many sacrifices may not be far distant."

Thus, as usual, my courage returned, after a short interval.

I resolved to have patience, and see how events would turn out, to keep up Emma's hopes, and to take every possible means of guarding myself against the dangerous plots and surprises of M. Lugarto.

I made Blondeau sleep in my room, I examined all the wain-cotting, and I re-assured myself a little, by the thought, that if he

had intended making use of that hiding-place, he would not have informed me of it, he wished only, without doubt, to put me into a state of continual alarm !

I saw very little of M. de Lancry.

By his air of despair, and his impatient and embittered temper I was convinced that Ursula had not kept the promise she made him ; but she was artful enough not quite to destroy all his hopes, in order to induce him to keep me with him.

Without mentioning M. Lugarto's letter, to him, I showed him the hiding-place that it had made known to me, he shrugged his shoulders, and made this extraordinary answer, with such a sardonic smile, that I was frightened.

" I dare say it was some good house-keeper who contrived that hiding-place to secure his provisions from the voracity of his servants.

\* \* \* \*

About a fortnight after the receipt of M. Lugarto's letter, I received a note. worded thus :

" Paris 4 o'clock,

" I would not write to you further, till I was quite sure of my information. Rochegune has an appointment with Ursula to-morrow ; not at her own house, but on the Boulevards ; it is more decent to begin so."

" The appointment is fixed for nine o'clock ; they are to meet on the Boulevard to the left of the *barrier de Fontainebleau*."

Thunderstruck by that news which I could not believe ; the next morning I got into a hackney coach ; and went to the place named.

I saw Ursula...who was waiting there.

A few minutes afterwards M. de Rochegune arrived.

He offered her his arm : and they both disappeared in a narrow lane which turned off from that Boulevard.

I had neither the strength nor the inclination to follow them.

I came home in a state of indescribable despair.

## CHAPTER XL.

ABOUT six weeks had elapsed since I had discovered the meeting between Ursula and M. de Rochegune.

I was expecting the latter in the Park de Monceaux, where I had sometimes seen him : he begged me to meet him there that morning having something of importance to say to me.

M. de Rochegune had arrived a few minutes before me.

"You are very kind indeed," said he, "to come ; you are the only person with whom I could consult on what has happened."

"Apropos...of Ursula !" said I.

He made an impatient gesture of contempt, and replied :

"Always the same ridiculous pursuit—I hear that she passed all last night in a hackney coach before my door."

"And that love does not touch you ?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah !" said I to him, "I still tremble...when I think that six weeks ago—I saw you arrive at the appointment she had made with you...give her your arm—and disappear with her."

"Did you not remember the manœuvres of that woman ? she knew that your name was a talisman, by aid of which, she could always create an interest in me, the first time that she wrote to me and signed herself the '*unknown of the Opera*,' saying that she had some important things to communicate to me...about you. I eagerly granted her the wished for interview ; judge of my disagreeable surprise when I discovered in her, the woman who had caused you so much grief. I dissimulated so little the repugnance that she inspired me with, that she perceived it, became very pale, and then asked my pardon for having given me the trouble of coming in vain, as this time she could not give me all the information concerning you, that she had promised ; but if I would return the next morning she should be able to satisfy me...I knew not whether it was designedly, but something she said, led me to suspect that she attributed to some mysterious cause, your return to your husband. Then Matilda, *malgré moi* ? I could not help feeling some ray of hope, and I consented to meet your cousin again in order to endeavour to learn the secret I could not help imagining that she was in possession of."

"I understand her tactics, my friend; the first blow was struck...she had almost conquered your antipathy towards her—and she counted upon her address and wit to turn it eventually into love."

"You do not know all yet——"

"How so?"

"Listen to me; a second, and a third interview proved as unsatisfactory as the first; but while she put off from time to time telling me the particulars she pretended she was in possession of, your cousin contrived to find means to bring before me continually the cruel truth that you were more in love than ever with your husband...if I had still retained the slightest illusion on that subject, Ursula would for ever have destroyed it...I know not why; but that last blow was a very cruel one to me, and made me feel more angry with you, than ever...but I must do this justice to your cousin, and tell you, she never spoke of you, but with respect."

"She knew that you would never have tolerated any other language," said I to M. de Rohegune.

He looked at me in a singular manner, and then said after a few moments of silence:

"Perhaps...I was so unhappy...all my wounds seemed opened afresh."

"What—you would have permitted Ursula to attack me...you! my friend, I cannot believe it."

"As that is all past now, Matilda: I may confess my weakness...my unworthiness; to you."

"Pray explain yourself."

"Well then, when at our last interview she had quite convinced me of your redoubled passion for your husband; I felt emotions of hatred towards you; in comparing you both, you so pure, and Ursula so corrupted, I said to myself, 'Perhaps if I had loved this woman; notwithstanding her depravity, she would have caused me less grief than Matilda has.'"

"Oh my friend what a thought!"

"I must tell you the whole truth, it will be my punishment...I was smarting under the indignation that your desertion of me caused; I thought that after all, the injury that Ursula had inflicted on you, was cancelled since you loved your husband again, more passionately than ever—to forgive M. de Lancry, was to forgive Ursula? And why should I be more severe than Matilda?"

"Oh my friend! could you deceive yourself by such paradoxes."

"Despair is a bad counsellor, Matilda!...what will you say, when I tell you, that seeing things in that light it was with a kind of odious satisfaction, that I gave a little encouragement to





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The Family Party of Marian

that woman, your mortal enemy, I took pleasure in recalling her caustic wit, and brilliant repartees."

"And Ursula, I have no doubt, fully responded to your advances," said I to M. de Rochegune bitterly.

"Fortunately," replied he, "I thought her very stupid."

"Ursula—stupid?"

"Yes."

"Ursula so seductive...so witty...so clever...it is impossible."

"I repeat to you, Matilda, that I found her stupid...she had not a trace of that wit which struck me so much at the ball at the opera; she stammered over some phrases unconnected, and without any point; nothing could be more dull or stupid than that interview, as soon as you were no longer the subject of our conversation...she seemed inclined to enter into long and metaphysical dissertations upon passionate love, and upon the charms of constancy and virtue, which were as revolting as they were grotesque coming from her lips; in short it was enough to fill one with disgust and pity; to say nothing of it's being very *mal-a-droit* for a woman in her position to bring forward such a catalogue of *belles maximes*. It put me out of patience, while on the contrary in the desperate kind of disposition in which I was then, I wished to have my thoughts dissipated by brilliant sallies, however cynical, paradoxical insolent, or caustic, they might be...I was in one of those *accès* of bitter despair when we doubt of all that is generous and good...but why should I tell you all this now that the danger is over?"

"Continue," said I, trembling at these confessions.

"Well then, Matilda, I must confess with all shame...that at that time, the audacious and perverse character of Ursula, might have acquired over me a most powerful and fatal influence—and who can tell what might have been the consequences? but in order to accomplish that I must have met with a charming mixture of wit, of boldness and of effrontery: a beautiful woman—attractive, and hardened, and not a kind of penitent school girl repeating moral maxims, with red eyes, pale cheeks, and a countenance quite faded and *passé*."

"And that complete change in the manners and character of Ursula," cried I, "did not touch you?"

"Not the least in the world, my dear Matilda. Either this alteration was real or feigned. If it were real, it proves love, I confess that, but one can feel but little flattered by inspiring even a *true* passion in such a character as Madame Ursula Sécherin's on the contrary, it was feigned, it was nothing but base hypocrisy. No! I say again, the only chance for your cousin would have to have shewn herself in all her former audacity, a perfect impudence and perversity...then perhaps, irritated by the courtesies, and wishing for some striking contrast I mir-

applied myself to read some pages in that corrupted heart—in the same manner as we take up a bad book to divert our thoughts—but the opportunity once lost, all chance was gone for that unworthy creature, I blushed for my momentary weakness...I became myself again and I felt all my aversion towards her increased... especially when I thought of all her conduct towards you."

"Ah! my friend—I see in all that a terrible retribution—that woman might have been dangerous to you...even to you...by remaining faithful to the odious principles which had hitherto guided her, and God has willed that the first time she has felt shame for her past life...the first time she has attempted to speak with sincerity a language new to her—but which from her lips lost all its value, she has ceased to breathe to charm; oh! unhappy woman, how much she must suffer if she feels the just severity of that lesson."

"You are not going to pity her," said M. de Rochegune to me in a tone of reproach.

"Pity her? No—but I have suffered so much myself, that I cannot think of the sufferings of others without emotion."

"I am not so compassionate as you are, Matilda, if that woman suffers, her punishment is well deserved; I would do nothing to aggravate it, but upon my soul I would do nothing to soften it...twice since, she has written to me to ask me to make another appointment, I have refused each time. So now all she can do is to station herself from time to time in my street. I cannot prevent that—but let us speak no more of her, I beseech you, the remembrance of her wickedness makes me sad when I think of it; and dismal thoughts come fast enough to those who are unhappy—as gold comes to the rich they say," added he, with a deep sigh.

"You are then still very unhappy, my friend?"

"Can you ask me? do you know what sort of a life mine is? do you know what I suffer, when I compare? but I must forget this, I must forget the past...it is dead—dead with the Matilda of former times—Oh! yes, I am very unhappy, at this moment nothing attaches me to life, my days all pass in a kind of monotonous despair."

"But what is the use of speaking of this," continued he with a sigh, "let us talk on the subject which brought me here. What I have to say to you, Matilda, is very serious, I have always hesitated speaking to you about it—and so I do now—but to you only can I confide that secret which, I fear, does not concern only myself."

On hearing these words I was afraid I should betray myself: as for some days past I had been expecting this communication.

In order to turn away all suspicion from me I interrupted M. de Rochegune by saying—

"I have also a very serious subject to speak to you upon, and which is of the greatest interest to me, since it concerns our best friend."

He made a gesture of surprise, and said to me—

"What is it? Explain yourself, Matilda."

"Why," replied I, with as much indifference in my manner, as I could possibly assume, "this is what I had to tell you: Yesterday M. de Lancry was mentioning to me the natural son of a Northern sovereign, who is just arrived in Paris; he is very handsome, very rich, and bears a high character, with the most charming manners possible. Of course he will be presented to Madame de Richeville; if by chance Emma should be pleased with him, and that he were worthy of such a treasure, would it not be an excellent opportunity for marrying that dear girl? do you not think so?"

I confess the assurance with which I was able to tell this story surprised me.

"You do not think that, hitherto, Emma has manifested any preference?"

"Much as I have been with her, and her mother, I have never remarked any," said I to him, "and you—at this time?"

"Oh! no, certainly not," replied he, "but for some little time past, Matilda, have you observed nothing singular in Emma's conduct?"

"Nothing—nothing at all, my friend, but you know, unfortunately for me, I now see much less of Madame de Richeville. Have you then discovered that Emma has any preference," asked I, with an air of surprise.

M. de Rochegune appeared to make a violent effort over himself, and then said—

"After all, I am very foolish to have such scruples—I would not on any account suffer any false modesty to be the means of causing grief to our excellent friend."

"Really I cannot understand you."

"This is what has happened, Matilda; since you have been lost to me—I have gone almost every day to Madame de Richeville—often twice in the day; I experienced a kind of sad pleasure in speaking of you. The Duchess was kind enough to receive me at hours when she does not open her doors to others. Emma, who very seldom quits her mother, was always present—that poor child regretted your loss as much as we did, she was so accustomed to hear me speak of you, as I had always been in the habit of doing, that I felt I could speak at perfect liberty before her. Several times I observed her looks fixed upon me with a singular steadfastness...at first it appeared very strange to me, but soon I became accustomed to it; once I came in without being announced, she

was alone in the drawing-room, she made a faint scream and blushed crimson. 'Why, Emma, I have frightened you,' said I, smiling. 'No! oh—no! feel,' said she, 'how my heart is beating...you see it is not fear,' and then taking my hand, with a gesture of the most charming *naïveté*, she put it on her heart, which in truth was beating violently."

"That is so like her...she is so delightfully ingenuous...but what struck you as strange in this?"

M. de Rochegune looked at me with much surprise, doubtless he thought he must have put me on the track.

"I do not think it absolutely strange...yet that agitation...her blushes."

"You know she is a perfect child! she was frightened."

"Without doubt, she was frightened, nevertheless that circumstance induced me to watch her more narrowly. I then remarked that whenever I came in she blushed as deeply as she had done that day, and was continually fixing her eyes on me in the manner I had noticed before. While we were alone, it was not much consequence, but when I resumed my habit of going there in the evening, Emma, to my great astonishment, shewed me marks of so strong a preference before the other guests, that I felt quite embarrassed; but what at last determined me to speak to you on the subject is this: The day before yesterday, as I was coming out from Madame de Richeville, I found Emma waiting for me in the anti-room, she said to me, with an air of mystery, while she gave me a little portfolio: 'To-day is my birthday; see what I have done for you, don't mention it to Madame de Richeville, it is a secret.'"

"And what was there in that portfolio?"

"My miniature, painted by herself, a striking likeness, though it had been done from memory...you will understand, my dear Matilda, that I am not deceiving myself by these appearances, insignificant though they may appear. It is a piece of childishness, but I owe it to Madame de Richeville, to myself, and to Emma, whose inestimable qualities no one appreciates more than I do. . to put an end to this folly...and it is on that account I wished to talk it over with you."

"I really think it is nothing more than the foolish romance of every young girl; and, my friend, if you will take my advice before that romance has time to become a decided sentiment, you will go away and travel for a little time, perhaps you may not wish to do that just now; but you are too true a friend to Madame de Richeville to hesitate; during your absence Emma's imagination will have time to get calm, I will manage to speak to Madame de Richeville about this young foreigner, if he is as agreeable as they say he is; and if he is presented to Emma as her future

husband, there can be but little doubt she will accept him as such ; then the feeling she entertains now to you, will find its proper level, for I believe it to be only a very lively friendship which her imagination has exaggerated. What do you think of my advice ?”

“ It seems to me the best possible...and though it will cost me something to follow it, yet I will.”

“ Why? what have you to regret here ?”

“ Everything and nothing...at present the least exertion is painful to me, I find a melancholy charm in remaining in the place where I have passed so many happy days with you. I feel a sad pleasure in talking of you to our friends. I confess that it is disagreeable to me to have to give up these, my only sources of consolation.”

“ I understand, my friend, but can you hesitate? Think how sensitive Emma is, reflect upon the sad consequences of such an attachment for her, if it continue to encrease. Poor, unhappy child! what would become of her? but your absence, and the probability of her marriage with another, would, I doubt not, suffice to cure this little fit of romance. I repeat, my dear friend, that, however painful to you, you must make that sacrifice...you must go away.”

“ You are right, Emma’s future happiness depends upon my departure...can I hesitate when I consider all that I owe to her mother, and the interest that I feel in that child, herself! Can there exist a more angelic creature, more worthy of all happiness ?”

“ You are right, my friend, she is a perfect treasure, and I trust if all things turn out well for her marriage, that it may take place within two or three months ; then you can return, and your friends will try to do all they can to cheer a life that you find so sad and so wearisome.

“ Is it not so in reality? what remains to me? what ties have I? what can I look forward to now? Oh! Matilda! relations and friends, however dear they may be, can never compensate for the loss of a love, which constituted all the charm of my existence, which was the foundation of all my pride and ambition!” and he added with an attempt at a smile...“ in that respect I am like those poor women who were in the habit of adorning themselves to please their lovers—he is no more—and they are ready to ask, of what use to them is beauty and dress.”

“ Until a new lover revives in them the desire to adorn themselves again,” said I, smiling.

He shook his head and said :

“ You know well that all true love is extinguished in me—can much happiness remain? I am only thirty, and I have perhaps a life to pass in that cold and dead apathy, those questions—what

shall I do? what will become of me? are insupportable to me, I would bargain for any future if it did but spare me the trouble of thinking of the following day. Sometimes I envy the mechanical existence of the cloister; that mute and passive obedience which deprives one of a will, that knows not what to do with."

"How can you speak so, you—young and free."

"It is just that liberty which is so frightful to me. I should try in vain to throw off the apathy in which I am plunged, it would be useless to attempt it."

Twenty times I was on the point of saying to M. de Rochegune: "Marry Emma, she loves you, your existence will then have some aim." But I feared to compromise, by precipitation, the success of a plan which had cost me so dearly. I said to him:

"Courage—courage! perhaps travelling will be the best means of rousing you from this temporary state of apathy, rely upon me, I will let you know the result of my observations with regard to Emma, and I hope soon to be able to announce to you that your absence has had the salutary effect which we hope for."

\* \* \* \* \*

The evening of the same day that I had this interview with M. de Rochegune. Emma sent me the following letter.

(Emma to Madame de Lancry.)

"I have followed your advice, my tutelary angel, I am going to tell you everything that has happened since I last wrote.

"You tell me that soon he will no longer be obliged to hide from me his love, and I believe you; for have you not already told me so much that has come to pass.

"According to your advice I have not hid any of my feelings—I was so happy in looking at him! and when his eyes met mine, and I did not turn them away, he must have read in them, the joy that his presence caused me,

"I know not whether you will approve of it, perhaps it is rather strange—but I have given him the miniature I painted of him—from memory—you know it. It was not from any idea that it could give him any pleasure to possess a likeness of himself, but I thought it would serve to convince him that he is always in my thoughts.

"M. de Rochegune is still very sad when he speaks of you—he is like Madame de Richeville and myself, we can none of us console

ourselves for your departure, after having had the happiness of seeing so much of you.

"I can perceive that *he* loves me! he no longer treats me as a child, the day before yesterday, when I gave him the portfolio, he regarded me with an emotion which brought tears into my eyes.

"When I think that it was only six weeks ago that I was dying! that it was you who cured me! I throw myself on my knees to bless you, I could pray to you, as to a Saint—with one word you saved me—that word *was his name!*

"There is one question that I am continually asking myself how can I have deserved that he should love me, should choose me, from among so many that he might have chosen from, does it not appear a most happy and unhopd for event, for your poor Emma!

"I should like to know whether I loved him, before he loved me—oh! yes, I am sure I loved him the first—it appears to me as if the contrary would be ingratitude on my part.

"Do not scold me—or think me very importunate, but do you think that *he* will be obliged to keep silence, much longer? when will he tell me that he loves me? you said in your last letter that it would be soon; but perhaps we do not count time alike.

"Forgive me, my good angel, I will be patient, I will ask no more indiscreet questions, besides now that I may shew him how much I love him, it would be egotism on my part to be impatient.

"Adieu—adieu—You see that I follow exactly your advice, come and see us; you know how much you are *cherished* by Madame de Richeville, by *him*, and by—your Emma."



## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE WEDDING.

M. de Rohegune wrote a note to Madame de Richeville to announce his departure, caused, as he said, by some important business.

The day after his departure I announced to Emma that she must make up her mind not to see M. de Rohegune again for some time, the family reasons which had hitherto prevented his declaring himself seemed to encrease in difficulty, and I told the poor child that M. de Rohegune was in such despair at quitting her, that he had not courage to say adieu.

As I expected, Emma was painfully struck by that unexpected blow, which came upon her so suddenly, destroying her hopes, or at

least deferring them to an indefinite time ; but I was obliged to risk a great deal in order to assure her happiness.

Many of the symptoms of Emma's illness soon returned.

She fell into long and sad reveries ; this time she was aware of of the cause of them. I had been obliged to take Doctor Gerard into my confidence, for I would not run any dangerous risk with Emma's health. He approved of my plan, and kept the secret from Madame de Richeville.

I had often written to M. de Rochegune, so as to keep him *au courant* to all these events.

I did not disguise from him, that Emma's state became more and more alarming, for M. Gerard had warned me of the danger of prolonging her suspense, I begged M. de Rochegune to return to Paris, his presence alone could do her any good.

He answered me in these terms.

" I shall be in Paris to-morrow night—what you tell me is frightful—and I cannot, unfortunately, repair the harm that I have been the involuntary cause of. Emma is an angel of goodness, beauty, candour, and grace ; she deserves a heart devoted to her ; if I had never known you, if it were possible for me to love—her love would have been my dearest treasure—but to marry her from pity ! Is that worthy of her ? Is that worthy of me ? all my hope is that perhaps you are mistaken in thinking the poor child is in such danger ; at all events I shall come—and her mother—our best friend ! Ah ! I know not what fatality pursues me !

" R."

Some hours after M. de Rochegune's arrival, M. Gerard, whose character he both knew and honoured, went to him, by my advice, and informed him of the really alarming state in which Emma now was.

In order to make him understand the danger of this relapse, M. Gerard gave him some particulars of her first illness, the same cause having produced the same effects.

" Well," said he to me, with a troubled air, " I have just seen M. Gerard—that poor child's life is in danger."

" Alas ! yes—I begged the Doctor, whose sincerity you are aware of, to tell you what he did, not doubting that his words would prove more eloquent than all the reasonings in the world."

" What he has told me has grieved me to the heart ; unhappily I can do nothing—I repeat to you, my dear Matilda, that I know no one better—more charming than Emma ; you know me well enough to believe that the circumstances of her birth would be no obstacle with me—once again I do full justice to all her excellent qualities, but I do not love her—I cannot love her."

" But in case her marriage with you is the only means of saving

her life, should you not then look upon it in the light of a duty?"

"A duty?"

"Yes, for one who possesses a great and generous soul!"

"It can never be a duty, either for me, or any one else, Matilda," said he, with a degree of firmness which frightened me. "I deplore what has happened, but I cannot help it."

"You cannot help it! when by a single word—"

"To say that word, it is necessary to love."

"But she loves you—she is dying...cannot that reflection soften you."

"And what have I done either to awaken or encourage that love? Is it my fault if the imagination of that unhappy child has become thus excited without any cause."

"Is it her fault that, seeing you every day, always hearing your praises, love for you, by degrees, has taken possession of her heart? Is it not cruel to pretend an indifference, which you cannot feel, for Emma's love should make you proud."

"I should be proud of it—Yes, I should be proud of it, if I were worthy of it."

"And why are you not worthy of it?"

"Because I cannot return that love."

"You cannot return that love, at this moment, be it so—but how can you answer for the future? think of what you said to me before your departure—of the ennui and the disgust which weighed upon you...that sad disposition of mind will encrease upon you—you love me no longer, at least you can no longer consider me as having anything in common with your fate; why should I conceal from you that every day strengthens the ties which attach me to M. de Lancry; as much as is possible, he repairs all his past faults; so you see, my friend, our former dreams were, alas! *but* dreams; as you have told me you will always preserve towards me the melancholy *souvenir* that we bestow on those who are lost to us—so I shall always feel for you the most affectionate friendship, the most profound esteem; but our two existences have different destinies awarded to them, and every day must separate us more and more—what then is the future that you are looking forward to?"

"A most sad one...you know that."

"And yet such a sad a futurity you refuse to sacrifice, when that sacrifice would save Emma's life?"

"Is it not better for her to die than to be chained to a heart incapable of loving her?"

"But how can you tell that the generous warmth of that pure, young heart may not re-animate yours, which you now believe is deadened?"

"That is impossible, Matilda, I feel that I shall never love again."

"Then," cried I, with bitterness, "then Emma must die! it is her fate! after all, of what consequence is the mere existence of one of God's creatures; Emma unites, it is true, the most charming and the most rare qualities; she is only sixteen...of the most perfect beauty—she wishes to die—she will die! and he, who by his contemptuous indifference, was the cause of that death; sacrifices that young girl, without doubt to some heroic ambition, to some grand passion, or at least to the attractions of a life of adventures, which rescues him from his state of lethargy. No...no, it is simply from a state of ennui, from an unworthy and dull apathy that he dreads to rouse himself, and to that sacrifices this angelic creature, the child of his dearest friend."

"You are severe, Matilda!"

"If M. de Mortagne was still alive he would have held the same language—what do *you* think *he* would have advised you to do?"

M. de Rochegune made no reply; he cast down his head with despondency, but he appeared struck by my words.

"His advice would have been sacred with you—you would not have hesitated—Ah! my friend, remember when you said to me, that an instinct of your heart prophesied to you, that our love would, one of these days, prove a magnificent example of devotion—no doubt you had a presentiment of what has now occurred. Be good...be generous, my friend, and do not shew yourself to be devoid of all pity!"

"Matilda, tell me frankly, do you think M. de Mortagne would have advised me to marry Emma from pity? could you wish it yourself, at such a price, would not *she* even refuse to marry me?"

"Can it be *you* who put such a question to me? but supposing even you yielded only to a feeling of pity, would you ever suffer Emma to guess that? No, no, I know your heart; rather than inflict such a wound on hers, you would deceive her by a touching falsehood. for she also is proud...you are right, she would die a thousand deaths rather than owe her marriage with you merely to your pity."

"But this is folly, because she must have known how much I loved you, how much I regretted you; has she not always heard me speak of you in the tenderest terms?"

"She knew how high your principles were, and was I not a *married woman*? was that not sufficient to convince her that our attachment could be only that of friendship!"

"And you would see me marry Emma with pleasure."

"I should rejoice in that marriage, because it would restore Emma to life, because it would open to *you* numberless chances of happiness, because it would transport with joy my best friend.

I should rejoice in that marriage because it would draw you out of the state of apathy, which you have not now strength to fight against, because, by degrees, you would feel yourself revive under the animating influence of that ingenuous love...because you would find a thousand charms in your domestic hearth! your life would have some aim, new ties would bring new duties; with the hopes of perpetuating the illustrious name you have inherited from your father, you would find your own noble ambition revive. And besides," added I, unable to restrain my tears, "you believe yourself, my friend, to be very unhappy! you have been forced to renounce your dearest hopes, but when we are deprived of all that would have caused our felicity in this world, what remains to us, if it is not to console ourselves by endeavouring to render others as happy as we would fain have been ourselves; see then, that poor child; her love has created for her a dream of such exquisite happiness, that she is dying...absolutely dying, because it cannot be realized! And you, by a single word, might restore her to life...might realize that dream. Is it not a power granted to you, resembling even a divine privilege, thus to be able to cause such happiness to another, that even her life depends on it? and is there not happiness in the very act, of bestowing that gift on another? Ah! stupid indeed must have been that man who could say that revenge was the greatest pleasure of the gods!"

"Matilda, leave me," said M. de Rochegune, visibly affected, "leave me...this kind of enthusiasm is too dangerous, one never yields to it but at the expense of one's judgment."

"Of judgment! and what course of reasoning the most austere would not end by agreeing with what must be the instinct of your heart, if you would but listen to it? My friend, you are affected, I see you are...ah! be generous, spare yourself the eternal remorse, which will be your lot if you cause Emma's death; spare me the frightful regrets which will haunt me in thinking that the griefs I have caused you have altered the natural goodness of your disposition! Oh! no, far from that, let our attachment prove the means of rendering us each more perfect in the performance of our several duties. I, in forgiving one who has made me suffer so much...and you in causing that unhappy child to forget all that *she* has suffered for you."

"It would be culpable in me, Matilda, to yield to the emotion your words cause me. One of these days you would repent of the misfortunes which my weakness would be sure to cause."

"No, no, my friend, yield! oh! yield to that noble dictate of your heart, and one of these days, holding Emma's hands in yours, with a smile on your lips, serenity on your brow, and joy in your heart, you will say to me: 'Matilda, your advice was that

of a good, a true, a sincere friend...thanks to you for it...I am very happy.' Then I," added I, unable to hide either my tears or my deep emotion, "then I..."

"What is the matter, Matilda?" cried M. de Rochegune, looking at me with anxiety.

I remembered all the danger of my involuntary burst of feeling, to excite any suspicion of the truth in M. de Rochegune, would have ruined all my hopes.

"It is nothing, my friend," said I, trying to force a smile, "I was only affected by picturing to myself the happiness that awaits you in a union with Emma; listen to my words and my advice; then the day will come, as I have already predicted, when each of us, happy in the fulfilment of our respective duties, may look back at the past, and in the midst of the charms of your domestic happiness I shall say to you, reproachfully—Ah! naughty one, were you not almost forced into it!"

"Oh! Matilda, be cautious, for Emma's sake as much as for mine—do not insist on it—after all, the risk to me is little, my life can hardly be more wretched than it is at present, but that child, for her—oh! heavens! what a deception."

"But that child already loves you, without hope—loves you to that degree that she is dying on that account, can then the future be worse for her than the present?"

"Ah! Matilda, it would be a sad wedding!"

"For Emma it would be the height of happiness. Promise me, my friend,—oh! give me your promise."

"Matilda!"

"In the name of your father—in the name of that friend whom we have lost, who would have joined his entreaties to mine—"

"You wish it?"

"I implore it of you."

"Then let that child's fate be accomplished."

"Oh! thanks to you—you best and most generous of men; ah, you do not know, you cannot guess the soothing happiness I experience in the tears I am now shedding," exclaimed I.

Thus my painful sacrifices were at least crowned by the confirmation of Emma's happiness.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

## THE OFFER.

WHAT have I more to tell? Monsieur de Rochegune's word was sacred. With his accustomed delicacy he understood the necessity of leaving Emma in the belief that he had long loved her. I undertook the task of announcing it to Madame de Richeville.

I went to her immediately; before I spoke to her I wished to see Emma.

I cannot attempt to describe her surprise, her joy, her transports, when I announced to her M. de Rochegune's return, and the offer of marriage that he had commissioned me to make to Madame de Richeville.

The dear child promised me she would feign great surprise, when the Duchess announced to her the good news. Thus my deception would remain undiscovered either by the Duchess or M. de Rochegune.

I then sought Madame de Richeville.

"I have just come from Emma, she is a great deal better," said I to her; Madame de Richeville bowed her head in a desponding manner.

"I am certain that Emma hides something from me. Monsieur Gerard has tried in vain to ascertain the cause of this illness... that unhappy child must cherish some profound secret which is killing her. In vain I question her...often I am inclined to think that she has discovered the secret of her birth, and yet I know of nothing to prove that my fears are well founded in that respect."

"Did not your Physician tell you that Emma's illness was nervous, nervous illnesses are as difficult to account for, as they are rapid in their cure?"

"Alas! nothing is more rapid than their return; only a fortnight ago Emma was wonderfully well, and now, in what a state of anxiety am I on her account."

"All your friends share in your anxiety, all will rejoice in the hopes you may entertain, amongst them I need not mention M. de Rochegune, whom I met this morning."

"He is come back?"

"Yes, he has communicated to me a very important determination, to reflect upon which in solitude he absented himself for some little time, you know that his life now is quite *déshabitué*."

"Alas! my poor Matilda, one cannot reproach you; you obeyed

the imperious voice of duty...but M. de Rochegune is very unhappy."

"He *has* been, but he is much less so at present; you know him—his is not a weak character that dwell with regret, for ever, on what cannot be remedied, he has courage to look forward and face his destiny—he still retains for me a sincere attachment, but his love could not survive the rude shock to which I exposed it, he has often told you so himself."

"Yes, I cannot hide from you, Matilda, that he has often repeated, with despair, that your return to your husband had destroyed his love, and that the Matilda of former days no longer existed for him."

"My friend, M. de Rochegune, never says what he does not mean—in this he is perfectly sincere, he is completely detached from me; I am going to give you a decided proof of it...I shall surprise you very much, when I tell you that he wishes to marry."

"It is impossible!"

"His absence, as I have told you before, had no other motive but a wish to have time to reflect seriously on the important determination; in a few years middle age will be coming upon him—he feels isolated, the future appears sombre and deserted; he will love no more with passion, as he has told you—and he never says an untruth...that sentiment is dead in him, but he feels the void that I used to fill, and can do so no longer, and he feels the necessity of filling that void by family ties, and seeking for happiness in the pure affections of domestic life."

"He! he—marry!" repeated Madame de Richeville, with astonishment, "and it is to you—to you, whom he has confided this."

"I am his friend, and therefore why should not he inform me of so important an event?"

"No doubt, Matilda. And yet to consult you on such a subject, you, whom he has loved so passionately—it seems almost cruel."

"I see in that mark of confidence, not cruelty, but affection! like him I have weighed our position; what can he do? Is it not natural that he should look forward? Is not the woman he may fix upon sure to be happy? You know the goodness of his heart, his noble character, and that if he marries it will be because he feels he can ensure the happiness of the person he marries."

"Oh! I have no doubt of that—all relations of life, all ties of duty, and sacred with him."

"Then why are you astonished at his wish to marry?"

"Ah! Matilda, there was but one woman worthy of him."

"I cannot quite agree with you in that, my friend, but I do think that M. de Rochegune, with all his fine qualities, has a right to be difficult—as Emma has, for instance."

"Oh! Matilda, I wish my only care for Emma at present was on that account."

"Re-assure yourself," said I to her, "your sole care, on her account, will soon be to aid her in the choice of a husband."

"Alas! you know not all my fears on that subject."

"You will tell me that I am out of my senses, but I must repeat to you with regard to her what you said to me about M. de Rochegune; there is but one man worthy of her and that is he."

"Who?"

"M. de Rochegune."

"M. de Rochegune?"

"Certainly."

"M. de Rochegune. Oh, my dear Matilda, you are really out of your senses."

"Not so much as you imagine."

"M. de Rochegune."

"Why yes, what is there so very astonishing in it? do you think him the kind of man who would make any objection to Emma on account of her birth? do you think him capable of wishing for a fortune?"

"Certainly not, but during all his life, he has never thought of Emma, and he never *will* think of her."

"But supposing he were to think of her, would it not make you very happy?"

"What a question—but of what use is it indulging in such dreams?"

"If they were not dreams."

"How?"

"If M. de Rochegune, struck by all the amiable qualities of Emma, which he has had full time to appreciate, was attached to her, not with a violent and passionate love, but with a steady and permanent affection, which would encrease more and more after marriage. If, in short, M. de Rochegune asked her hand of you, should you give your consent?"

"Matilda—Matilda, this is the first time that you have caused me a feeling of grief, am I not uneasy enough already on Emma's account without your adding to it by such jokes?"

"By the memory of my mother, my friend, I assure you that what I have told you is the truth. M. de Rochegune has commissioned me to ask of you the hand of Emma, and if she consents the marriage is to take place as soon as possible."

These words were preceded by an invocation, so sacred with me, that Madame de Richeville was obliged to believe me.

I will not attempt to describe her astonishment and joy, redoubled

by that of Emma, who faithfully kept the promise she had made me.

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It was all arranged...my task was accomplished...Emma would be happy, M. de Rochegune would be happy...but I...I...I must confess all.

As long as M. de Rochegune seemed to consider his marriage with Emma in the light of a sacrifice...as long as I perceived that *malgré lui* he was still under the influence of my remembrance, I felt a kind of melancholy satisfaction, my sacrifice seemed to cost me less.

But when by degrees he became sensible of the irresistible charms of that child whose life seemed to hang on his presence ; when he discovered all the treasures of her angelic mind ; when he said to me that there was perhaps but one woman in the world, who could have consoled him for my loss...and that woman was Emma ; when he told me that the happiness he now owed to me, would doubtless one of these days make him forget all the affliction that I had caused him ; oh then I confess, I had very bitter, very painful feelings—I was ashamed of them...I was indignant at them ...but I could not drive them away.

This intended marriage was soon the news all over Paris.

Some saw in it a proof of spite or inconstancy on M. de Rochegune's part ; others, a *tour de force* of Madame de Richeville's ; some affirmed that M. de Rochegune was so fond of doing extraordinary things, in order to make himself talked of, that his marriage was one of those *originalities* ; for how was it otherwise possible, to believe that he should bestow himself, and a hundred thousand *écus* of rents, on a poor orphan, without some such motive.

The marriage was to take place at Rochegune as soon as all the necessary formalities could be concluded.

—o—

## CHAPTER XLIII.

I have spoken but little of my domestic proceedings during all this time. Monsieur Lugarto's horrible communications had entirely ceased, I had become familiarized with what at first caused me so much fear. Blondeau always slept in my room, as I eat but little,

and was determined to guard against any treachery, she always prepared my meals for me with all sorts of precautions.

I had the secret door firmly fastened up, and you will laugh no doubt at my heroic resolution ; but I bought a very sharp dagger which I always had placed by my bed side.

For a long time after the receipt of M. Lugarto's diabolical letter I had frightful dreams, but by degrees they ceased, and I became habituated to a position, which had at first appeared to me both intolerable and alarming.

I saw M. de Lancry very seldom : he had no doubt lost all hopes of recovering Ursula ; notwithstanding his obedience to her commands respecting me.

If at this time I had endeavoured to persuade my husband to consent to a separation, I think almost he would have agreed to it ; but, for a thousand reasons, easily guessed, I felt myself obliged not only to remain sometime longer in the same position, but also to make it appear that it was my free choice to do so.

My life was a very monotonous one, I saw Madame de Richeville and Emma every day.

I received no visitors at my own lodgings ; during the day I drew, or worked at my embroidery frame, and I walked in the Park de Monceaux, or called on the good Prince d'Hericourt and his wife, who continued their friendship to me through not without scolding me good naturedly on the subject of my foolish love, and misplaced *dévouement*.

I was waiting impatiently for the marriage of M. de Rochegune to take place, then I hoped to retire to Maran which had been purchased for me, in Madame de Richeville's name ; I had also given into her charge my diamonds which my mother left me, they were valued I believe at fifty thousand *écus*. My husband had tried all he could to get possession of them, but I had always resisted, reserving them as a bribe, to induce him one of these days, to consent to a legal separation. If he accepted them as I thought he would, it would then be very easy for me to give out that M. de Lancry was tired of the life we were leading, and that I had been only once more made the dupe, of my own credulity, doubtless I should not obtain much commiseration, but I should console myself by the reflection that, at last, my horrible chain was broken.

A trifling occurrence which happened at this time, made me form a resolution which led to fatal consequences later.

For sometime past nothing had occurred to remind me in any way of M. Lugarto's horrible interference, when one day I perceived a little disorder amongst a number of letters that were always in a tortoise-shell casket, the key of which I kept myself.

There was no letter missing, yet it appeared to me as if the casket had been opened during my absence.

It was impossible for me to doubt for a single moment the fidelity of Blondeau, but though I had no reason for suspecting the other servants that I had, yet remembering the power of gold, and all M. Lugarto's resources for corrupting them, I resolved no longer to keep any papers of importance in my own possession.

Amongst these papers was my correspondence with Emma, a correspondence which proved the active part I had taken, in bringing about her marriage, as well as several letters from M. de Rochegune, in one of which he speaks of Emma's illness and his regret, that he could do nothing to alleviate it, as it was impossible to think of marrying her from pity etc., etc.

I could not therefore confide these letters either to M. de Rochegune or Madame de Richeville; some accident might have thus discovered to them the secret I so much wished to hide from them, besides they were both of them, as much objects of hatred to M. Lugarto as myself, and on that account the papers would not have been safer with them, than they were with me, I could not think who I could give them in charge to, when M. de Senneville occurred to me.

I often met him at his aunt's. I had heard he was a man of honour, sure, and secret, and so I begged him to take charge of the casket.

It was arranged that when I had any papers to add to those already in it, I should send them to him, Blondeau was to take the key and place them in the casket.

M. de Senneville granted me that favour with the best grace in the world—I had such a dread of M. Lugarto's getting hold of that correspondence knowing the diabolical use he would make of it, that I begged M. de Senneville to come to me one evening, and carry the casket away with him, without letting any one see it.

M. de Senneville had the tact to make no allusion to his former attentions to me, he felt that it would be very bad taste to appear to renew them, just at the moment that I contracted an obligation to him.

I received the following letter from M. de Rochegune some days after his departure for his estate, where his marriage was to take place :

“ Rochegune 20th. October, 1836.

“ Emma is my wife ; and it is to you, my noble and sincere friend that I must offer my thanks for all the happiness I enjoy ; it is your doing, your predictions have been verified, your counsels have attached me to existence by creating the most sacred ties—such ties bring duties ; and the fulfilment of a duty, has always been to me a source of pleasure.

“ You were the being I loved best in the world ; you are now the

one I most religiously esteem, I owe to you a happiness, that I could not have pictured to myself, that of *living in another* or rather causing another to live, by living for her.

"I feel for Emma, an attachment perfectly *unique*, nothing can be more charming than the naive ecstasy with which she enjoys the life she now leads with me, the sight of her happiness, has restored me to happiness, her love has made me *almost* in love with her.

"Why should I conceal this from you? it is not the same kind of love as I used to feel for you, that was extinguished by one cruel blow, in all its grandeur, and all its strength. As I have said before that is buried as in a tomb, and if by any miracle it were ever to revive again, it would be in all its pristine beauty, as when it first took possession of my heart.

"No! no! Thanks to God, and happily for me, for you, and for Emma, the sentiment that she has inspired me with is not composed of the ashes of our former love, it is a sentiment pure and fresh, such as she only could have inspired me with, for her love is unlike that of any other woman, and such love as hers, must create a corresponding return.

"At every step I advance in the happy path you pointed out to me I say to myself, 'Matilda was right.' I remember those words so noble and full of truth that you said to me, 'When we are forced to renounce all that would have caused our felicity upon earth, what remains to us but to console ourselves by rendering others as happy as we would fain have been.'

"I cannot picture to you the profound happiness of the good Duchess. She can hardly yet believe in our marriage; sometimes she fixes her eyes, full of tears, on me and says, 'It is really true! It is not a dream! my child is adopted into your Paradise.' But then at others she becomes sad, and exclaims, with fear—'Oh, this felicity is too perfect; some misfortune must menace us.'

"I assure her, as well as I can, but she is superstitious, like most people who have suffered much; but for you, I too in the state of apathy in which I was fallen, should have become a fatalist.

"We have discussed the question whether it would be better to make known to Emma the secret of her birth; I think not; Emma's delicacy and sensibility are so great that I should fear it would occasion in her a continual struggle between her principles which would force her to condemn her mother, and her affection for her which would make her wish to excuse her.

"If by any chance she should discover this secret, it would be a great misfortune—but why should we anticipate it.

"We remain at Rochegune till February or March. Emma wishes it. I will not repeat to you our regrets that we shall not see you here. You know, alas! what are the obstacles. I endeavour

to console myself by thinking that you are happy. I know you, and am sure that poverty does not annoy you ; on the contrary, you are capable of finding a charm in it, if it helps to clear your husband from blame.

"Adieu, and once more let me thank you, Matilda ; but for you, not only should I have been the cause of the death of that child whom I now so tenderly love ; but I should be leading a miserable and unprofitable life—perhaps even a guilty one, for I never think without a shudder of the time when I regretted not finding in your infernal cousin her usual audacious disposition.

"If she had been what she used to be, led away by my despair, which would have induced me to yield to her fatal charms, I should perhaps have joined myself to her lost soul, and perhaps like her, I should have devoted to evil the faculties that God had bestowed on me for far different purposes.

"We know that the further we are from danger the more likely we are to judge coolly and considerately of it ; well, then ! I repeat to you, I confess it, the danger was great—very great ; it required all the absurd fascination of that woman, not to perceive, by the impatience with which I listened to her virtuous homilies, how much I desired that she should speak a different language.

"But I have strayed far away from my angelic Emma—poor child ! she could not believe in such a character as Ursula's ! It is, however, always when we are safe in port that we like to talk over the storm that we have escaped, it is because my life is now so smiling and peaceful that I like to recal the dark clouds that seemed once so nearly to obscure it, it is because I am so happy, cherishing that charming child in my bosom that I evoke the fatal physiognome of Ursula. \* \* \*

I was at this passage of M. de Rochegune's letter, when I heard a noise in the little sitting-room which joined my bed-room ; all of a sudden the door burst open, and M. Sécherin, pale, and distracted appeared before me.

"In the name of Heaven, come—come," cried he ; "she is dying—she wishes to see you."

"Who is dying !" exclaimed I, in the greatest alarm, unwilling to suppose he could mean Ursula, notwithstanding all the harm she had done me.

"I tell you Ursula is dying—dying, and I not there, oh come quickly ! for every moment of delay is a moment of her life lost to me."

"Ursula ! Ursula !" repeated I, clasping my hands with stupor and dismay.

"Oh you are without pity—since even I—I have come to beseech you—you might come—did I not tell you she is dying—her

minutes are counted—and I not there," repeated the unhappy man, trying to drag me after him.

I took a shawl, and bonnet, and followed him mechanically.

A hackney coach was waiting, we got into it—it drove off rapidly.

M. Sécherin scarcely appeared aware of my presence, his eyes were red, and swollen with weeping, his features were all distorted by his paroxysms of despair, he pronounced a few unconnected words, and seemed only able to think of the speed we could go at, urging on the coachman by all kinds of promises.

"But when did this sad news reach you," said I, to him, "is there no hope, can nothing be done for her?"

He looked at me steadfastly.

"Hope! after having taken such a dose of poison as she has," cried he, with a burst of convulsive laughter.

"She has poisoned herself—Ursula?"

Without answering me, he grasped my hand with violence, and said to me in a low husky voice—

"I can only kill your husband once."

"Do not think of vengeance now, think only of trying to save her, if there is yet time, and your mother?"

"My mother," cried he, "my mother is here...my God! we are not arrived yet...Ursula will be dead, you will see, she will be dead."

"But how did you hear this sad news?"

"By a letter—only a few lines from her, if I wished to see her for the last time, she said to me—I must come instantly to Paris—my mother—implacable—as she always is—Oh this coachman—how we creep—she will be dead!"

"Well, your mother?" said I endeavouring to draw his thoughts into another channel.

"Oh, my mother," replied he, with a broken voice, and manner half delirious. "Oh my Mother, immediately said, '*this is a farce—that she is playing, in order to obtain your pardon—a farce!*' oh, that letter felt to me like death—I could not be mistaken—I set off from Rouvray—my mother followed me—a farce! You will see whether you are even able to recognise her poor altered features—but the wishes of the dying must always be sacred—Ah! we are getting near—oh if she does but live long enough to forgive me for my harshness—no! not my harshness—my weakness—for it was through weakness that I yielded to the hatred my mother felt towards her—and then what happens? A poor creature commits a fault—instead of showing indulgence—instead of showing goodness—instead of endeavouring to reclaim her by generous proceedings—she is driven away like an infamous woman...she is cursed...then..."

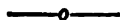
then what would you have her do? she rushes into something worse, and is to-day lost...then the day comes, as she had always a good heart, when remorse seizes her...her life is a burden to her...she poisons herself...and then they say—'Bah!...it is all a farce! it is all a farce! See what my mother's hatred has caused...see what are the consequences of my weakness.'

"But the physicians! what do they think?"

"The physicians," added he, with that convulsive laugh and wild manner which frightened me—"The physicians did not say as my mother did—'*It is a farce.*' They...they say...'*She is a dead woman,*'...then I cried out to my mother—'Well are you satisfied...you hear—'*she is a dead woman!*'—ah!—we are arrived—it is here," exclaimed he.

The carriage stopped.

M. Sècherin rushed out; I followed him as quickly as I could.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

### DEATH.

AFTER crossing a small neglected garden full of weeds and stones, we arrived at a little ante-room, then into a larger room, damp, sombre, dismal, and furnished in such a manner as to denote poverty, if not distress.

There—Ursula was dying!

An old woman of repulsive countenance appeared to be her nurse.

My cousin dismissed her by a sign as soon as she saw me. What a sad spectacle! Oh, my God!

Ursula, dressed in black, was stretched upon a sofa: a large shawl covered her feet. She appeared to shudder with cold—one of her hands convulsively grasped the cushion which sustained her weary head, with the other hand she endeavoured to throw back the locks of her beautiful brown hair which fell around her forehead; her face, frightfully thin, was livid: her large blue eyes were almost extinguished. When she saw me her countenance brightened a little, a painful smile seemed to struggle on her pale lips. She clasped her hands together with an expression of deep gratitude.

"Matilda!" said she, in a feeble voice, "you are very generous—but I expected it. I wish to be alone a few moments with you."

"What, again! again!" cried her husband, who had thrown himself on his knees near her, sobbing; "no! no! I will not again quit you!"

Ursula turned towards him a supplicating glance.

"Ah, that look—that gentle and beautiful look!" cried M. Sècherin, contemplating his wife with torturing agony; "ah, there it is; though she is dying, I recognise it; it was just so she used to look at me; I know it again—and she is dying—she is dying!"

"I beseech you, my friend, to leave me for a few instants alone with Matilda; my last moments shall be devoted to you, to ask your forgiveness—as I shall of her—for all the harm I have done you—and her."

"My cousin—I beseech you," said I to him.

"I have no longer time to make many regrets," continued Ursula, trying to smile at her husband, "oh do not refuse me this."

He got up suddenly, and went out of the room hiding his face in his hands.

"Matilda," said Ursula, with a profound effort, and giving me a key, "in the writing desk in my room you will find a packet of papers—of letters, I wish them all to be burnt—the sight of them would only increase the affliction of the excellent man whom I have so shamefully wronged—the effects of the poison have been too rapid—so that I was not able to destroy them before the arrival of my husband."

"Your wishes shall be executed," said I to her, turning away my head that she might not see my tears.

"Matilda," said she, after a moment of silence, "I am dying for M. de Rochegune—I may confess that to you without wounding you—since you no longer love him."

"Great God!—at such an awful moment—have other thoughts," cried I, "do you not know that he is married?"

"It is on that account that I could bear life no longer; though he had hitherto always despised me—though he refused to meet me again after the two interviews that I had with him, nevertheless, a vague hope still sustained me—madness as it was—But when I heard that he was married to an angel whom he loved—I then felt—what I ought to have felt sooner—that for me—there remained only to die."

"Oh Ursula—what harm you have done—to yourself—and to others!"

"Yes!—but since; I also—I have suffered much, oh if you knew—at the interviews I had with him to speak of you—with what disdain—with what aversion he received me!—in order to raise myself a little in his estimation by showing him the influence he had exercised over my heart I wished to tell him—all the high aspirations that I owed to him—I wished to prove to him that, owing to him, I was worthy of comprehending pure and virtuous sentiments—oh unhappy wretch that I was—the words seemed to fail me, hardly could I express the new and noble thoughts which had so rapidly developed themselves in my mind—In my agitation, in my fright, I

in general, so bold—I hesitated—I stammered—a word—a look of approbation from him would have encouraged me to proceed ; but he froze me by his cold and ironical air, and I could only add some unconnected words. Yet never in my life had I been so sincere—never had I felt more elevated sentiments—Alas ! I was, without doubt, unworthy of speaking a language so noble—Oh Matilda ! if there is any expiation in grief—you will forgive me, for what I suffered that day.”

“ Yes ! yes ! I believe you, unhappy woman—you must have suffered much.”

“ But this is not all—you do not yet know what renders my death doubly frightful.”

“ Oh my God ! say what ? ”

“ Yes ; at least you shall know that—and you will pity me. After I had swallowed the poison, when all hope was gone, when there remained no other alternative for me but to die, God in his terrible vengeance revealed to me the only means by which I might have expiated my faults, deserved the interest of him for whom I die, and the esteem of all.”

“ How is that ? But even now is there not time ? ”

“ No—no ; there is no longer time. I feel my end approaching—and it is that, oh ! it is that which renders my death so frightful,” cried that unhappy creature, bursting into sobs.

“ Ursula—Ursula—calm yourself. You are so young. Perhaps all hope is not lost. God will accept your good resolutions.”

“ Oh, life...life now, *that* life that I have so criminally sacrificed. My God...it is not on my own account that I implore it of you,” cried she, clasping her hands together with a gesture of despair. It is on account of that good man whom I have so unworthily outraged ; and I swear to you...oh, my God !...that by my devotion, my submission, I will make him forget all the affliction I have caused him.”

“ Ursula, what is this you say !...this remorse.”

“ Do you not understand ? can you not comprehend ? that instead of terminating my life by crime, I ought to have lived to repent, to have thrown myself at the feet of my husband...at the feet of his mother ; neither of them could have remained insensible to a *true* repentance. I should have passed the remainder of my life in rendering theirs happy, for I could have done it...oh, I could have done it, I am quite sure, of myself ; and then, one of these days, a long time hence, when I had proved to them that I was really become virtuous and good, I might perhaps have dared to say to that man whose influence had made me so...‘I was a base and miserable creature ; I loved you, though you never knew it...but that love of which you were ignorant was sufficient to inspire me with all those virtues I was before deficient in ; there is in your

character something so noble ; that to love you, even in secret, is enough to inspire one with the resolution of becoming worthy of you. Ever since the thoughts of you came to purify and change my heart, all those around me love and bless me ; but, ah ! unhappy creature that I am...it is too late," cried she—" you see well it is too late."

" Oh, this is frightful," cried I ; for in truth such a reformation would have been grand and beautiful.

" Oh, it is not that—it is not that merely that it would have been grand and beautiful," replied Ursula, with exultation. " You know me, Matilda—you know whether I have a firm will and strong energy ; well, all that firmness of will and strength of energy I should have turned to good ; I should have been capable of every kind of devotion in order to restore my husband to his former happy life...and to merit the austere esteem of M. de Rochegune, which he must have granted to me...to me, who, thanks to him, had risen from a position so degraded, to one so happy."

" Poor...poor Ursula !" said I, with agonizing concern.

" Oh, how generous you are to pity me, Matilda ! Is it not horrible to die...so young, and with such hopes before me ; to die, deserted and despised—detested by all...when I might have lived to be loved and respected. Is it not frightful and a terrible proof of God's vengeance ?"

The unfortunate woman exhausted by this last emotion, could add no more, her voice failed her, she fell back fainting.

Ever since the beginning of this conversation my aversion for Ursula had all merged, in the pity that I felt for her.

Her love for M. de Rochegune had in it something so touching, so elevated, it shewed itself by such strong signs of repentance that I could not help deploring with that unfortunate woman the fatality which prevented the expiation of her faults.

Frightened at seeing her in my arms almost insensible I called her husband who came instantly.

Ursula breathed with difficulty ! her features were contracted by an expression of agonising pain. The spasm became less, but already the shadows of death were hovering over her. She moved her hands feebly about her as if she were endeavouring to drive away some frightful apparitions.

Then she opened her eyes, and said with a dying voice—

" Matilda—you forgive me all the harm I have done you ?"

" Yes ! yes ! I forgive you, and may God forgive you, on account of your last resolutions."

" My friend ; where are you ? I do not know but it seems to me that my sight fails," said she looking round for her husband with a vacant look.

" Ursula—Ursula, you must not die...It was not I, who drove

you away without pity—No, do not accuse me of it—do not accuse me of it...It was my mother who was so pitiless...it was my mother who insisted on it," cried he with agony, "it was my mother!...curses on her...curses on me."

Hardly were these fatal words pronounced when Madame Sècherin appeared at the door that her son had left open.

The appearance of that old woman was as usual austere, her countenance pale, inflexible, threatening. She approached slowly with an awful kind of majesty.

"An impious son, has dared to curse his mother," said she in a loud and angry voice.

"Madam have pity on him!" cried I, "Ursula is dying."

"Her death is worthy of her life...she dies the victim of a crime!"

"Mercy! madam, mercy!" said Ursula, clasping her hands with terror, and half raising herself up notwithstanding her state of weakness.

"No mercy for you!" replied Madame Sècherin, drawing herself up to her full height; she accompanied these words with a gesture, an accent, and a look so tremendous, that her son remained struck by stupor and fear; it seemed as if the Divine vengeance manifested itself in the person of his mother.

"Mercy!" said Ursula again, "mercy!"

"Did you show me any mercy when I said to you—'have pity on my son!'"

"Oh! I repent...I repent!"

"It is too late."

"Oh! forgive me...your son has forgiven me...Matilda has forgiven me."

"There is no pardon for adultery."

"Oh! my God!"

"There is no pardon for impiety."

"Mercy!"

"There is no pardon for suicide!"

"Ah! I am cursed!" cried Ursula, falling back without movement on the sofa.

M. Sècherin having got over his first sensations of fright, cried with an indignant voice—

"My mother—my mother! you make a martyr of that woman...God will take pity on her!"

"And the martyrdom that you suffered. Mad man that you are, and the martyr that I have been made, and for how long!"

"But she repents. my mother...she repents."

"She fears the punishment due to her crimes, that is all her repentance."

"Oh, yes! a farce!...a farce! it is not mother!"

"A farce—yes; such fruitless remorse is a sacrilegious farce, played in the sight of the grave, which is yawning to receive her." Then addressing herself to Ursula with increasing indignation—"From the fear of eternal punishment you have repented within these few last hours; but for three years...this unhappy man buried in the solitude to which you consigned him did not pass an hour without shedding tears of blood! You repent for a day—you—and during three years—I, who had only him—I, who lived for him, I have seen...have shared his tortures...for a mother feels all the ills of her child that she cannot cure; and then because you cry '*mercy!*' all these sufferings are to be forgotten! What! while one was living in adulterous pleasure and worldly dissipation—and the others in tears and solitary despair—because the unworthy creature who caused all the misfortunes repents of the past, from fear! then guilty and innocent are at once to become equal in the sight of God! No—no! no mercy for you on earth, no mercy for you in heaven!"

M. Sécherin was going to reply, Ursula took his hand, and said, turning her head with difficulty towards the side where her mother-in-law stood.

"Alas, madame...what can I do, but repent. Can I help my fears? was it wrong, oh my God, to wish before I died to ask forgiveness of those I had injured? What can an unhappy creature do more, who is abandoned by all, except to offer, as some expiation, all that she has to offer—the sincerity of her repentance! I have done you much injury, madame, and also your son, the best of men, and also Matilda, who was as a sister to me; my life has been criminal; you have cursed me; my father will hear of my death without regret—the world will say that I am justly punished."

"Yes—yes! justly punished," repeated Madam Sécherin.

"I do not say this to excite your pity—only madam, you so severe; but so just—reflect—that when I was quite young—I was confided to the care of the most wicked of women. Ah! for pity's sake remember that during my childhood and my youth, that woman did all she could to encourage in me every evil propensity, hatred, jealousy, and hypocrisy."

"Your cousin was also brought up by that abominable woman, compare your life with hers."

"My natural disposition was as bad as Matilda's was good, on that account, I required good example, and severe discipline. My faults, may they not be owing to my fatal education—for I feel that I might have been better than I am," said she casting on me a look of sad intelligence, then she continued:

"Ah! if I could have lived—it would not have been by a fruitless repentance that I should have repaired the mischief I have done, but it is too late—too late! that is true madam—God has willed that a

criminal death should close a guilty life—none will pray for me except the two beings whom I most injured in the world.

The features of Madam Sécherin appeared to lose a little of their impenetrable harshness. Instead of fixing on Ursula a look of anger she contemplated her for some moments with a deep attention ; perhaps affected, in spite of herself, at the sight of that unhappy woman whom she had last seen in the full enjoyment of youth and beauty, and in the full exercise of her proud and audacious character, now struggling in such terrible agony.

Ursula could not bear the fixed and penetrating looks of her mother-in-law, she took hold of her husband's hand, who could hardly restrain his sobs, and said in a voice which became more and more feeble :

" My faults have caused sometimes—some estrangement between your mother and you, my friend ; this occasions me the most painful remorse—promise me, I beseech you, relief from this—I shall die less unhappy if I know that you will seek consolation in her, whom perhaps latterly you have not sufficiently valued. Then, when she finds you are once more become as good and tender son to her, as you used to be, as you would always have been, but for me, perhaps your mother may feel a little pity—when she thinks of me, whom she would not forgive, I who should have seen my last hour approach with less dismay—if her venerable hands had blessed me—at such an awful moment as this, my friend, make me this sacred promise I beseech you."

" Oh I swear it—I swear it," said M. Sécherin, overpowered with grief.

" But this unhappy woman must not die in this manner," cried Madam Sécherin, whose features at last expressed a pity so long suppressed, " she must not die without prayers and without a priest !"

" The church refuses to receive those who commit suicide ; I have not dared to ask for a priest," said Ursula, in a low and trembling voice.

Madame Sécherin knelt beside her daughter-in-law, two tears trickled slowly down her wrinkled cheeks ; and she clasped her hands, saying :

" O Lord ! her repentance equals her faults, I no longer feel in me the power of hating her, may you pardon her, as I forgive her !"

" My mother—my mother ! oh my life, all my life I swear it," cried my cousin, and unable to add anything more, he covered with tears and kisses the hands of Madam Secherin.

Ursula brightened up for a moment with surprise and joy, she exclaimed.

" Oh my God, you have had pity on me, she has pardoned me !"

" And I bless you, poor unhappy woman ! and I will pray for you,

for you have been misled. Yes, I must believe it, your heart would have been good if it had not been so perverted when you were so young."

And Madam Secherin took Ursula's head in her two trembling hands, and kissed her forehead.

"Oh permit me—for once—the first and the last time—to call you—my mother—at this moment—that word will be so welcome to my lips, I think it will cause me to die with less bitterness—

"Yes! I am your mother—my heart melts at last!" cried Madam Sécherin, with deep emotion, "I also have my regrets, and they are too late—perhaps I have proved too inflexible, I should have treated you as my child, and not have closed the door of repentance by too great severity."

"Oh, my mother, you have saved my soul from despair—at my last hour; oh, my mother—I leave you your son, worthy of your tenderness," said Ursula.

"Oh yes! here I swear it, my life—my whole life shall be devoted to your memory and adoration for my mother," cried M. Sécherin, "but God will not now let you die—he will grant you time to repair your faults—to make me happy—he will take pity on me, I who have suffered so much, and my poor mother who has suffered so much also—now that you are her daughter—that she has pardoned you—now that we may all be so happy together—God will not let you die now—will he my mother?"

Ursula's strength was almost exhausted. This last emotion was too much for her.

"My mother!" said she with a dying voice, "I wish—to lay—my head—upon your bosom."

Madam Sécherin bent over the sofa, and raising Ursula gently by the shoulders, held her in her arms.

"My friend—your hand. Matilda—yours."

Alas! it was cold as death, that poor hand relaxing in its hold; she had not strength to clasp mine.

Ursula continued becoming more and more weak:

"Now—adieu—and for ever—adieu—forgive me my faults my mother—my friend—Matilda—pray for me."

"My child—my child, I bless you," cried Madam Sécherin, in a solemn tone, laying her venerable hands on the head of Ursula.

Ursula expired.

M. Sécherin after some paroxysms of furious despair; fell into a state of complete insensibility, he neither seemed to hear or see; but he moved about mechanically without ever uttering a word.

I helped Madam Sécherin in performing the last sad duties.

We passed the night in prayer by the side of the corpse.

Ursula's father would never see her again after she had quitted her

husband, and he had been for some time past travelling in Germany.

Not wishing the particulars of this sad event to be more known than it was possible to avoid, and not knowing to whom to apply for the necessary melancholy preparations, I begged Doctor Gerard whose discretion I had had full proof of, to take upon himself that office.

According to Ursula's request I burnt all the papers that I found in her writing-desk. From the thickness of the packet I thought it contained the leaves of the album in which Ursula was in the habit of writing the details of her proceedings, of which M. Lugarto had sent me the copy, through the treachery of Ursula's *femme-de-chambre*.

Whether that girl (who was a creature of M. Lugarto's) had deserted her mistress before, or after she had poisoned herself, I know not.

Happily for M. Sècherin he remained in a perfectly unconscious state, not at all aware of anything that was passing around him.

His mother brought him into Ursula's room, he sat down on the bed, his arms crossed, his eyes fixed, and remained so for sometime, mute, and immovable. He came however several times during the night while we were praying, and knelt with us, but he appeared to imitate us mechanically, and not to comprehend what he was doing, his looks were always wild, and he returned to his room without speaking a word.

Towards the morning, exhausted by grief and fatigue, he fell asleep on a sofa.

With a degree of rigour that seemed extreme, the church, availing itself of its rights, refused to receive the body of Ursula, which was therefore carried at once to the burying place.

I would not quit that sad habitation till all was over.

I shall never forget that most painful scene. It was in the middle of autumn, a gloomy morning, dim with fog.

For the last time Madame Sècherin and I, we prayed by the side of the coffin which was exposed to view in the kind of little anti-room, which opened upon the miserable garden.

There was neither priest, nor holy water, nor lighted chapel—nothing in short, that could veil or soften the horrible desolation around. The silence was only broken by the gusts of wind without which scattered the dead leaves, that had fallen all around.

Alas! *malgré moi*, notwithstanding the desolate sadness of that scene, I could not help remembering that the last time I had seen Ursula it was at a fête where she was brilliant in youth and beauty full of wit, grace, and charms, and surrounded by homage.

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Blondeau, whom I had sent for, came to tell us that the hearse was arrived. I could not restrain my sobs.

I kissed the coffin, and returned with Madame Sécherin and Blondeau into our apartment. We heard a confused sound of steps—some harsh voices, which were silent for a moment, then the heavy, measured tread again—and then the rumbling of a carriage as it slowly drove away.

I wished to take a last look of adieu at the remains of Ursula. I lifted up the corner of the blind—I saw the hearse go away unattended—alone—no one followed.

It disappeared—and all was over.

It was a horrible moment; the rumbling sound of that funeral hearse seemed to vibrate to the soul of M. Sécherin; he threw off his stupor, looked around with a glance of wild enquiry, and then doubtless remembering the dreadful truth, he fell into his mother's arms with a piercing cry.

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No priest pronounced a last prayer over the grave which received that unfortunate young woman.

Unhappy Ursula! miserable victim of the infernal wickedness of Mademoiselle de Maran! who perverted a disposition by nature so energetic and firm, merely that she might make her the instrument by which she would wreck her hatred on me.

Poor Ursula! Yes—notwithstanding all her faults she had in her generous instincts! a soul that was capable of feeling so noble a love as hers, could not have been entirely corrupted.

Oh, it was terrible for her only to have idea of her reformation when it was too late to accomplish it. Yes, Ursula would have persevered in it, with her accustomed firmness of will, to sustain herself in that honorable and elevated position she would have brought to bear the whole energy of her character. The unhappy woman said truly—"It is God alone who can have revealed to me such a future, just as the tomb opens to receive me."

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That day, before I returned home, I entered the church of St. Thomas D'Aquin. I went to the sacristie; happily I found a priest there; I begged him to say a mass for the repose of the soul of Ursula, and I joined in it. Alas! as I left the church my eyes filled with tears at the sight of the confessional, where Ursula and I, when we were children, received the holy water.

In that church Ursula had made her first communion with me.

## CHAPTER XLV.

## THE REGRETS.

M. SECHERIN returned to Rourvay with his mother. They both came to see me before their departure. My cousin, plunged in deep despair, spoke but little ; in quitting me he said, with a low voice, and an air of fierce uneasiness—

“ Unless they kill your husband for me before the death of my mother !... Ah ! it is a long time to wait for my vengeance ! ”

He did not give me time to answer him, but hurried on to give his arm to Madame Secherin.

All his hatred was concentrated on my husband, it could not be otherwise. Ursula had rejoined him in Paris ; in the eyes of the world, as well as in M. Secherin's, M. de Lancry appeared to be the author of my cousin's fall. I had forgotten to mention that my husband had been absent from Paris for some days ; he only returned the day after Ursula's death.

I knew not what would be his intentions with regard to me, when he was apprised of that sad event.

I could form no projects ; I was entirely in his power ; my voluntary return to him had for ever rivetted my chains ! yet, all his hopes destroyed by Ursula's death, what further interest could he have for keeping me with him.

There was one measure upon which I counted almost infallibly for obtaining my liberty.

Two days after the sad occurrence M. de Lancry came one morning to me.

“ Well ! ” said he to me, “ you must be delighted—you have had your revenge.”

“ What do you mean, sir ? ”

“ Your mortal enemy—Ursula—is she not dead ? It must have been a glorious day for you, the day of her death.”

“ I watched her dying moments with fervent prayer—her repentance made me forget everything.”

“ Oh ! to be sure,” said he with a bitter smile, “ forgiveness of injuries is very edifying, and your cousin had given you cause enough to exercise your magnanimity.”

I remained stupified and appalled, at hearing my husband speak in that manner of a woman for whom he had sacrificed everything. The expression of his countenance, instead of being that of des-

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